

A dark, atmospheric painting. In the foreground, a woman with long dark hair lies in a wooden coffin, her body covered by a blue cloth. She is holding a thorny branch that extends upwards. At the top of the branch is a large, dried sunflower head. From several points along the branch and the sunflower, bright red liquid, resembling blood, is dripping down. The background is dark and indistinct. The overall mood is somber and macabre.

THE
SAND
CANYON
REVIEW



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REVIEW
2012





Dear Reader,

Welcome to THE SAND CANYON REVIEW, returning for its fifth consecutive year as a distinguished magazine of literature and the arts. It has always been our goal to encourage creativity at Crafton Hills College. As such, we proudly showcase the works of talented artists and authors, whether fresh novices, seasoned professionals, or anything in between. We humbly thank all of our contributors, wherever they come from—the local area, around the nation, and around the world who have risen to the occasion with their exciting contributions to the 2012 edition. Our theme for this year's edition is Vulnerability. We have sought to portray that theme through literary and artistic excellence, and we hope that our readers find each page stimulating, entertaining, and inspiring.

Sincerely,

~THE SAND CANYON REVIEW Team~



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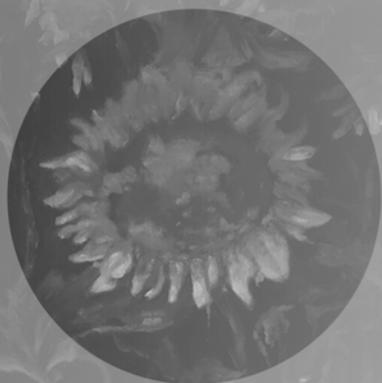


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POETRY

“An event occurs ... a poet sees it, then deconstructs it and puts it into words on paper. We read the words, reconstruct the event, and then experience it. That is poetry. All of that must happen in order to have poetry.”

— LARRY EBY

Rewards

J. R. Bermuda

Furthest from an A-frame lashed
with woven wool cords and
canvas stretched tightly over
character of forbearers

My inheritance is enclosed within
this pile of slim branches and
ropes unraveling quicker than
my startled soul had anticipated

defective genes accompany daring
namesakes to serve as the only
monument to the bald begetter which
never mastered the family trade

On the Ninetyone

Michael Tesauro

In reality, this is traffic
but I am nine and I wish
it is a parade procession.

I am with mom, we sit
inside the stomach
of our steel car.
It lumbers
like a mammoth at fifteen
miles per hour.

We see a Latino couple
perched on the freeway divider.
Their flock of boys
The flames lick their eyes
while they watch an inferno
violate their minivan.

The sparks jump in the air,
then they drift out of reach.
They become the sky.
Cautious waves of light
trail across the bloated sky.

In reality, this is a parade
and those lights drip
until empty morning.

The Coast of *il Mar Tirreno*

Nina Romano

The fragrance of grass, bent and bruised underfoot
as you trudge in laced-up sandals across the field,

listening to the way the whistling wind sometimes stutters,
studded by a squall of dust-laden tiny straws and thistles.

At the edge of the marketplace you stop to drink
from a spout of an ever-running fountain;

inhale the salt sea spray and wonder how can it reach so high,
up here, where figs, grapes and pomegranates abound on tented stalls.

The din of quibbling, the cries of the hawkers, the laughter of children,
running in and out the narrow alleyways, mothers cawing for their return.

You're seduced by a feeling of well-being this eventide when the city
on the mount appears on your right through a cluster of palms

pinnacles and church spires glow a luminous rose. Passing courtyards,
you follow scents of spiced lamb, a Macedonia of fresh-cut fruits,

consecrated with Kirsch, eggplant roasting above live coals to the end
of a cobblestone lane where an aperture between scarred buildings

leads to an overlook, a walled semi-circular esplanade astounds
for its ancient familiarity; your gaze drifts down to the billowing sails

of sailing craft in the turquoise water below. Once you captained
a sloop to the emerald coast of *Sardegna* with a lover you adored but let go;

now, standing on the precipice, the wind billows your tunic to startle
and your eyes seek hawks spiraling away in air currents to mock you.

In moments of imagined clarity
I sense the perfection of your influence
And conclude that it is worth dying for

But the pursuit of this wild dream demands negotiation with reality
There, the sought after influence is obscured by limitation
And I conclude that I have been pursuing the dream of a fool

In this alternative imagined clarity, possession is seen for the lie that it is
I am smitten by the knowledge of my self-deceit
I surrender to the overwhelming tide of my imperfection

But as approaches a wave too immense to contend with
And as I open myself to be willingly dashed once-and-for-all beneath its immensity
I am suddenly buoyed-up by your gravitational force and carried safely in by that very wave

Ashore, alive, heart thrumming with gratitude and love for creation
I take what I have been given and create splendorous moonbeams with focused skill
I post them on the night sky for all to see as a tribute to my adoration of you

I relish in humble acquiescence to yet a third imagined clarity
Where I see that I am made to worship you
And that worship, for me, is found in the struggle between pursuit and surrender

It

Brian Roth

She says someday, holding off hope for as long as she can.
I hear Sunday, pulling It closer.

It remains so universal; problematic because
It can mean so many things: me, she or
the present lying alone on the floor:

Which she hears as four and positions on the clock
Which I read as flour and collect in the corner

Symbols are more than mere substitution of
complexity by simplified reduction in terms.

Force still needs mass and acceleration but

mass doesn't need
location like waiting

acceleration does need
changes in velocity like

velocity does need
changes in location

both over time over time:

While force can be the body of a dead man
While force can be the slime trail of a slug

Written simply as $F=ma$
It is still unclear that
It is anything more than a
child equationing his
love for a mother; for a father.

Love Cars

Robin Lysne

You make me better. How the thought before
the poem, how it changes after

Ambling skunks and an elderly heiress who
buys up land in her view, how painting or poetry make my day.

Then the quaking hour, when
tell-tale signs sing out of those love cars

on Lowell's hill, you make me quake
when I think about it, the two of us in one

a shiver that went through you earlier that day
as we walked past the young black model

posing on the beach with her cadre. We welked sideways
as crabs in a borrowed residence, ogling her.

I saw your shiver, and I felt my opposition, white
edging sixty, wrinkles, and you squeeze my hand

as we walked about a place to pee, another beach, dinner, oysters or
those black muscles maybe. Still you make me shiver

when I think you, of this tenuous moment,
how either one of us could turn away any time,

though after dinner, we were the ones in the love cars off
Hwy 1 dangling near a cliff edge scooping love bites

from seaweed, shivering in each other's sex. This is when you
mentioned love cars, how we were in one, in Lowell's poem at the same time.

You enliven me with those skunks, your muscles
in their brown skin, rippling as you touch me, hand to my breast.

How to Play Chess

Robert F. Padilla

King
Queen
Rook;
Bishop
Knight
Pawn;

Don't be afraid to use each one
forward - diagonal - L-shaped
En passant.

Come from all directions

ATTACK!

From each side.
King next to king is not a part of the quest
One space must separate the two great behemoths

Great help from friends
if pawns reach the end,
they may change to queens
and aid in the end.

Surround the king!
That's the main goal of chess
But removing the king
Is not a part of the quest

North of Thrace

Rachel Reynolds

But thou, most ungentle of the sweeping winds, why art thou bent on waging war with me?...What wouldst thou do, were it not that love is known to thee? -Ovid, *Heroides*

This morning, watching your pale legs jump
beneath me in bed, knees bent to know
my cupped palms, ankles arching

out - I came again to that field of first
yearning, first Boreal stirrings, the Indian grass
grown sway now with ascendancy, those four winds

unyielding. A child, I knew the rise of horse and hill, low
bowl of the sea as the earth tipped itself sweetly
toward desire, and I came up breathless from beneath.

The waves broke above me. The hills below.
Farther off a young man pushed a bicycle alongside and up
a steepness of days. Ladderless, the sun climbed.

Some mornings after I would wake, a woman
of twenty, my body (stilled windmill in sleep) now
startled, now animate - your breath on me.

Outside the wind picks up. The fan blades -
mill's arms stir. As if to reconcile the body with its
fragile resistance, the cornsilk

hairs along my stomach sway. Back and back,
to Orithyia, the field in fog. Chost-green, the shadows,
wet shine of her northern eyes.

When he comes for her. Says low *Love's country's*
not far from here now. When wingless
she goes trembling to relief.

The Boys

J.Ryan Bermuda

Handsome, some would say
these tall, slim figures
broad shoulders, bad posture
The powder flash
leaves spots
hanging in the air
and leaves likenesses
which we wouldn't know
if we'd see again

Four days past 18
buttoned up to their necks in green
proudly, took the only option
for those young and unmarried

“When I get home,” uttered in good spirits
but as a plea, a petition-
Swallowing the fear
of making deals with God

‘The right thing’ would soon been blurred
by flashes of mortar fire
and the country we'd give our best to
would be a vision-
we'd struggle
in the deafening, furious night
to remember existed at all

For now, snap one more, Mother
steady hands, throat lumps-
and say grace for us, Father
because tomorrow-
both your boys
will join the ranks
of heroes and men

Dog Granola

Cindy Rinne

Spider in the stainless steel sink
reminds him about the time
his daughter tripped over the garden
hose. Fell head-first into the pool.
She was three. His wife blamed him.

The frog in the pool scolds him
for trying to silence the croaking
with an airsoft gun. He walks
his dog on Ranch Gate Road.
Covers his face in hopes
no one can see him. The bank
can not take his home
if he disappears.

The dog munches granola,
orders him to shut the gate.
He photographs dragonflies
and feathers as they cling to the sky.
Places secrets of the universe
in a cardboard box. This side up.

Riding in an Open Bullet

Marsha Schuh

Riding in an open bullet

away from time and should
must be or else, and what
can possibly come of this
sidling up to stars that never shine
in the norther hemisphere, riding waves
that have nothing to do with sane
shore or boards in the sun
forgetful of all things

Sometimes the best moments of life
are not the finest;
they reside in secret
places that remind of what it is to be
sipping memory wine at midnight
quiet moments savoring
far more than daylight
so scrupulous in all things

We are the sum of all that's read
or seen or been and what
does that really grant
but a wish for what is not
and never will be
In this time called life--
for want of a better word--desire.

Abi the black groundskeeper
The chief groundskeeper
The English Nigerian

Abi the black groundskeeper
Is outside washing his Benz again
Not so much washing as caressing

Running a warm soapy soaking wet washcloth
Across her tight white two-tone flanks
Watching her drip and shine in the warm bright California sun

Abi the black groundskeeper
Is indulging in his one true love
that four-door squared-off matron who carries him on Sundays

Carries him to see his cousin the housing agent
And his other cousin the teacher
And his other cousin, the who-knows-what

Come to think of it,
He'd better baby that car
So it can do another two hundred thousand miles

Abi the black groundskeeper
Is outside washing his Benz again
Not so much washing as caressing.

Home horses head on Monday, move
drip sojourns drenched in trailer's gray.
Wet floorboard chills the barn crew bound:
On concrete sopped muse ponies ride.

Familiar drab of yellow,
lined reminders blip - hysteric's hash
Each yellow tick is progress, soon
Expressive trot by stiff limbs speak
I bite and bay and make it known.

Suggestivbe text, choleric twists
Accept my gush, mr frigid breath
Perceive in me my anger? This
my language of the locked in shell.
The only speech I'm graced to tell.

They burned the
Isla Vista Bank of America.
I touched the scorch marks
and smelled the ash.
I wondered about an Asian
war that took my husband's
friends. He would've fled to Canada.

Flower child – Woodstock – Peace

I saw the young man at Rhino
Records almost kissing my husband's
feet. You heard Zappa live!

Smoke-filled – Groovy – Day-glo – Neat

Our 1968 British Racing Green
MGB convertible pulled over by the
pigs. They beat long-hairs in those days.
Wrong license plate they say.

Zulch

Music on My Mind

Kelsey Gaines

I write the songs that make the whole world sing.
God gave rock and roll to you.
Who is to truly take credit for this joy that uplifts our souls?
Lola? Lucy? Dirty Diana? Sami? Billie Jean?
Apparently, women are to be thanked.
But men are focused on in music too.
Five guys named Moe, for five. The boys who recently returned to town.
Louie Louie. And Jack had to hit the road.

Maybe I am getting a little off track.
This happens to me sometimes.
Music is on my mind. I can't help it.
It's every beat my heart makes.
Music is my sustenance. I adore it with my very being.
I don't know if music should be studied, unless that is what you love.
Music is meant to be enjoyed, enthralling the listener.
With or without lyrics, there is a message.

Trite candy songs and sugar don't last.
Like their food counterparts, they dissolve almost instantly.
It's the wholesome songs, the everlasting themes, that stir us.
Love. Vanity. Jealousy. Pain. Anger.
That is where music comes from. Big, passionate emotions.
The joy of music is the joy it feels in being music.
If that makes any sense.
Which I can sense that it doesn't. Much.

Why do we sing?
Perhaps that question should go up there with some of the greats.
"Is there a God?" "Where do we go when we die?" "Why do we sing?"
The answers are arbitrary, important to only those who want to know the answer.
I want to know. So I made an answer.
We sing because our beings know that we are all different.
We sing because in all the difference, we want something to be together.
We sing. To be together

The Seven Anxieties of Sex

Brian Fisher

i.

I remember the last time she probably doesn't. I must focus, must refrain from being too quick. Pacing, it's all about the pacing.

ii.

All she ever reads are those romance novels. Hunks on the cover. Two hundred and fifty pages of attraction, chase and perfect sex. I know I will be compared to a fictional character.

iii.

I told the doctor he wanted the prescription, just to try it. I don't always need it. The doctor would not play along. I asked my older brother if I could have one of his Blue Bombs. He said, "Just take half. Better yet, just take a teeth scraping of it to start." I took the whole pill.

iv.

Next time, I'll just take a lick, like Alice with her mushroom.

v.

Once upon a time, my girlfriend and I watched "When Harry Met Sally." Sally demonstrated how she can fake a very convincing orgasm.

vi.

Foreplay. The romance. A night at the movies, a late dinner in a nice restaurant the kind with tablecloths and candles. I wondered later why I had the second beer, and the third.

vii.

I really don't want to be Pierre, the French super model. I want to be Bob, Clark, or Frank who has been a bad boy.

Peeling Layers

Serah Rhodes

peeling off the murky layers
sorting out my new geography,
brick paths appear- east and north
as I untangle the fray.
measuring, stacking each cautious metaphor
- blossoms, tiny and orange, emerge
from the sun-dappled chasm deep within

The Geometry of Us

Valentina Cano

It was that minute in the elevator,
that moment when we
careened through floors
with only a gap of words between us.

It was then that I knew
the way we watched each other
would have to end.

It would have to be untangled,
like a skein,
a section at a time
until we could stretch out in parallels,
untouched,
the space growing wider and wider
until we become only dots.

InkeD

Nathan Goens

Bare and exposed,
On the table the body goes.

Like a story to be told,
Like a scar never healed.

As if a surgery performed,
As time passes color fades.
As pen to paper fadith.

For Alzheimer's and Parkinson's
could not conquer.

For pain warmly embraced.
For memory's not for gotten.

Ink to skin ever last.
Feelings trapped in flesh.

After Vietnam

Ryan Mattem

After Vietnam, my uncle stops bathing. His bathroom becomes a closet where things are lost. Single socks. Keys. Mail. My aunt is afraid to go in there. She says a crow flew in once. She went in to shoo it through the bathroom window and slipped on mushrooms budding through a moldy rug. From a couch in a rented trailer, she shows me the scar on her knee.

A few months after Vietnam, my uncle stops leaving the house. We try to intervene, my aunt who has begun filing papers, my mom and I. But the smell motivates memories of our childhood nightmares, so we leave. We drive home without speaking.

A year after Vietnam, my uncle is too dirty to live. He dies with a bottle between his legs, a year of soot beneath his fingernails. The television lighting his warpainted face. His cigarette still lit, the smoke bulbing in the round of his hand, staying there.

Untouchable

Susan Vicuna

Bloody bones spiking through
my skin becoming my wings

Flying past the treetops, fucking
gravity without paying the bill

Slaughtering the fatted
calf with my bare hands,
choking off its last
breath with calloused
hands, eating the stomach,
with its half-digested grasses,
sucking up the fat, relishing
in its warmth, gnawing
the bones and the precious
marrow, savoring
the sweet, sweet blood...

Continuing on to the next rung of the ladder
from the bloody pebbles of rock bottom

Continuing on, as if
the sirens aren't going off

Mirror, Mirror

Jack Hernandez

What do his mirror neurons reflect,
That man in the barber chair?

His hair, fraying like the collar
Of his button-down shirt,
Requires little time to trim,
cutting a description long discarded.

That finished, he looks
At the end product: his head
Seemingly smaller, skin
A dry, receding landscape.

What is he forced to see?
Time used and time vanished,
Finality staring back at him,
Eyes a little terrified.

He feels a slight, impotent revulsion
At being neat and readied.

The Weight of Change in My Left Pocket

Shelby Pinkham

Hope

Became a powder,
Blown and gently placed on foil,
Non-stick.

Respect

Was now gathered in a spoon,
Lit and sucked through a straw,
Red-striped, snipped in two.

Courage

Had been pawned for three crumpled 20 dollar bills,
A pair of 25 cent pieces,
And a grimy nickel.

Coin

Now in my left pocket,
The right being ripped,
Emerging from yet another hole in junked jeans
I had had on for a week.

Feet
Laced to their ankles,
Met concrete,
Pushing me forward to meet,
Yet another estranged addict of the streets.

Lapels
Were adjusted
On a faded black coat
With a lit cigarette lying casual over lazy lips.
He matched my stride and we shoved onward in silence.

Money
Was exchanged
On a faded gray afternoon
With a lit cigarette lying casual over lazy lips.
He doubled his stride and shoved onward in silence.

Friends became running partners,
Family amounted to no more than the prophet of their pockets,
Therapist replaced with dealer,
The meetings were shorter,
But the prescriptions made sooner.

Promises

Susan Vicuna

The rusty weathervane noisily indicated
the breeze was blowing north as the old Chevy
drove South down the deserted highway.

Bernadette sat uncomfortably on the ripped
upholstery, promising herself she'd get it replaced.

She stopped at a gas station, trying to decide between
Milky Way and Butterfinger. She got both, promising herself
she'd call Jenny Craig as soon as she got settled in the city.

She filled the tank with the card Jimmy had gotten her.
She bit her lip at the memory, promising herself
she'd get her own card as soon as she got the chance.

She looked in the rear-view mirror, wiping the chocolate off
the corner of her mouth and the tear from her cheek.
She started the car, promising herself she was going to be happy.

Once she got to the city, everything would be fine.
This was going to be a new start, she promised herself.
A new Bernadette. A new life.

The Burning of The Titanic

Geoffry Dyer

The duration of his voice was not labyrinthian or a complex. Words to describe wine become simple and banal, and my least favorite form of lethargy enumerates fortitudes of your compelling: go down to the water. Look for.

There is no in sight in end, the structure of turbulence is carefully placed and unshakable. The darkness manifest provides the layers of moonlight and netting you require for climbing. I see you from the skylight, when I only close my eyes.

You can only mean
in front of me, purple
from the bars and separate.

You are writhing in the same book repeatedly, I know.

It is
my youth.

Burying Dead Things

Nina Romano

after Kenneth Rexroth

The reedy knife-edged clouds, spatter
a benign snowfall; a storm moves
menacingly slow above the mountain.
At a glance you grasp peace, power

and ferocity simultaneously. After
dawn on the rise, white frost paints
dun-colored sedge, to expose elk tracks
and bear scat as I trace an old Samish

path to flatter terrain. A field develops
into meadow upon meadow and stretches
outward to an uphill incline of apple
and cherry orchards trees bare skeletons,

begging to be covered in an eiderdown
of white. In a *terroir* part sand and gravel,
I stand among ancient stones like cobbles
tossed by gods unknown into the old river-

bed, soil like sand, in between dried moss,
an archeology of a defeated archipelago.
Where have the beavers gone, the pelts
that made mountain men wealthy, weary,

yet terrifying? Where are the branch bridges
and damn constructs of animals so practiced
they never spoke, only barked to one another?
The black deer tracks lay bare in ice forms

and shadows among scruffy and untidy,
buttery maples lean anxiously across water;
gone is the penetrating golden light
that gleams on the stream, shriveled

and shrived through in which the torpid fish
still swim. Left are ripples, eddying dead leaves
cottonwoods, aspens and alders now naked,
not even a promise of warmth in the darling

crimson dogwood. I cut my gaze
and the cinches tethering the bodies

Gypsy Horses

Jeffery Alfer

The oldest horse at the edge of the field
that borders a railroad won't return
to her stall until an old patriarch who
rode her for two decades takes the reins
himself, speaking to her in soft Romani.

Some beasts conceal fear better than others.
The last time he fetched this one, he feared
she knew somehow he'd tried to sell her.
He failed to get the price sought, so returned
her to fields where she paws the wildflowers.

In the lateness of the day in the makeshift
courtyard of an encampment, the old
man watches ravens plummet between
rows of hickory and oak trees, cawing
angrily, as if Elijah refused their bread.

As he descends the field now, he fades
for a moment into the shadows of trees,
holding his hat against the rising wind.
The sun inches westward beyond a shoal
of storms as his wife emerges from the house.

She steadies a chipped decanter that holds
fistfuls of daisies picked from the field
ravens now halo between the tridents
of distant lightning, a sky under which
horses, like dark fire, are circling.

Mount Vesuvius and Pompeii

Linette A Cortes

If she is Mount Vesuvius and I am her city,
Perhaps, then, you know the story:
One Sunday, she was rumbling with anger.
The violent hot rage radiating at her earth,
began to simmer, to boil, to build up
she finally explodes into expressions

If she is Mount Vesuvius and we are her daughters:
Herculaneum, Naples, and lastly, Pompeii,
The three surrounding cities,
will receive the burning flame of blame;
but all of the pain upon pompeii
She protected her sisters from the boiling rain

While she is Mount Vesuvius and I am her city,
I was surrounded in traumatic heat,
Which I would not discover took me over,
and suffocated me for 1700 years.
Underneath this blanket of ashes,
I rejected life but yearned to be loved.

While I am the city and He is Alcubierre,
Who, as quiet as the ruins, unveiled my beauty.
He dug up my ruins: solidified, dead
but preserved under pumice.
I rewarded him my treasures,
and off he went;
But he gave me the attention of the world.

Lost Sketch

Julia Bloch

“In fine you will see here Love, Fortitude, and Vertue, very naturally Painted; and a Truth which needs nothing of Romantick to make it absolutely Moving.”

—Aphra Behn

Women poets who
note the achievements

Bluestocking women from their
fantasy of 1688, To the Fair

Finch, women poets contribute to
poets. Relate American poetry to

the expected words tracing a word
mythology in the Renaissance.

In truth, Aphra Behn’s life was not
the single most better-known

Dorothy Mermin: “Women becoming
marginal figures” to “Women Becoming”

Venus and Adonis, Kate Chopin and
Aphra Behn, Of all

The Lucky Chance. The feminine soul,
vast material, links, sections on Behn

the single most important form

(if only poetry could contain French)

INTERSECTIONS



JULIA BLOCH

INTERVIEW BY LUKE HARRIS



A strange café in Hollywood. This is some type of ambush meeting; it's always weird meeting people in real life that you've met online. I arrive early and look for the poet, Julia Bloch. Well known in her field, her work exhibits many different themes and ideals. She's good. She knows her form, her prose, she knows it all. I hope my measly set of questions can, perhaps, tap the surface of her work. She arrives looking lovely. I start the questions, hand shaking every moment. She's nice, she's polite, and I start:

Q: How would you define your personal work? Do you identify yourself with any particular movement?

A: Well, I do try and identify myself with a variety of poets who identify themselves as just-after modernism. But, in reality I vary through a wide variety of styles. So there are some ways in which I see my work as conversation between some of the language poetry work, some of the new-narrative work, and especially in terms of working with the prose form work. And there are also a lot of poets that work in new-lyric work.

Q: What was your first published work? Your very first one.

A: My first thing published was actually a short story. It was published in my hometown newspaper. But my first published poems was while I was at Mills College, and it was an online site called On the Page. It was called leisure.

Q: What forms were you interested in back at Mills?

A: I was really interested in the Sonnets. I used to write them a lot, but even that evolved into playing with their style and form, and question whether something can or can't be a sonnet. But it was a major influence in pulling me into the short-prose form.

Q: What is your editing process? There are plenty of poets who don't edit at all. Do you consider that a divide between an amateur poet and a professional one?

A: Oh, well there are plenty of poets who write a draft, and that's it. But sometimes, if they have the technical skills, the nature of poetry allows some people to just write a draft and that's that. But I personally go through about a half-dozen drafts before I have anything I am really happy with. There is this really great poet named Lorinne Nedicker, who has this line that says "I love to delete and eliminate." And I really identify with that sentiment. I really like to cut down a poem. The finished draft is always a stripped down, more refined version of that poem.



MOUNT AIRY

A stone house takes a hard turn at the exit.
Red flashes in its uppermost corners before dark.

A painting remembered from another hemisphere
with whole suns sinking into the canvas,
something caught in the center and trying to exit.

But what are this room's intentions, what here
is empty of air. An arm warmed by stone, angled
apart from the camera. A close movement,

a moving at an angle, and sparks lighting up
within a ribcage while real light lights up the stage.

Now there is no painting, there is
no red curtain or feathered motion.
A postural silence squares off the stone room
and faces turn up in the night air.



Q: What is your advice to would-be publishers in poetry?

A: I think the two most important things that new poets should think about are: read as many poetry journals as you can. In print, and online. Just become really familiar with the different styles and voices in the poetry world. Become really familiar with what's out there. Pay attention to their styles and what type of poetry they publish. And also if you like a particular poet, look at their bios, where they came from, read about them, read from them. If you identify with their works, think about getting published in the journals that published them. I think the most important piece of advice that I ever got, which I still try to follow is that if you submit a poem and it gets rejected, wait a maximum of two days, and send it again. Just keep sending it out, and keep sending out your work. It really is a case of how much work of yours is out there. Proving you have a body of work is important, that your committed to it, and driven by it. There are so many journals out there and it can seem daunting to a new poet that has never seen their work in print before. But once you get that first poem out there, it really does become easier. People start to recognize your name, and people start to become familiar with your work, and it really does become easier and easier.

Q: I see some pop-culture references in your work, is that a recurring theme? Are you trying to say anything in particular with those references?

A: I came to pop-culture first as a consumer of it, and second as a lover. I was working as a writer and editor, called Curve magazine, which is a lesbian pop-culture magazine, so I was actually interviewing and speaking to “celebrities” on a pretty regular basis. And I talked to them about the intersection of pop-culture, and politics, and gay rights and eventually—it just started to seep into my creative works. I saw it especially in a series of works called I dreamed I was the death of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, because, obviously I was a huge fan, and I thought it was a great show. It had some amazing feminist themes in it, and I started to look at it like its own art, expressing these themes so well, and before long it really started to show up in my own poetry as well. And with Buffy;

I started to watch it in secret, and I was kind of embarrassed about how much I liked it, but then I found out other poets watched it too. And liked it not only as a form of entertainment, but a creative medium as well. And I think that's [pop culture] is where the majority of Americans find identity. Including myself, and that's where we can really relate to each other. We can really identify with ourselves through these mutual interests, and even more so these days.



THE SACRAMENTO OF DESIRE

I know the structure of what I wanted to say
but not which fibers, whether natural or technical.

I left before the end of the makeover because the radio
in my red rented Focus would not Seek properly.

Like the song says me, I play for fortunes.
Sacramento at night is filled with squares of

exhausted air that collect all the day's stunted effects.
You, with your shoes planted in overaerated

parking lots of desire; I with my unencumbered hair;
vague figures making a sound and not trying to believe

that it is new. Bluish variations in cloud movements
seemed to function as signs that something was about to end.

That did not accomplish
what I was intending.



THE TIGHT PANTS OF THE ARTS

Furnishing that clouded red light
into something that was in the other museum.

I am too old to remember that song.
I mean in the way you do fondly.

This blind cellphone, a memory
loosening its bindings.

A “find” function for things locked
in an embrace.
A carbonized new decade.

Something else goes on. We’ll catch up
eventually. Meanwhile let’s overcook
the food, let’s clutter up our salads.

And you, a great
upright bullet
with your face
turned to the stars.



“The best thing about the artist’s life is freedom. You have no superiors. If you want, you can go traveling. If you want, you can draw. There is a good chance that after death, people will remember that you lived on the planet. And the worst thing is, freedom is difficult to obtain.”

—ALEXY GOLOVIN



ART

Stones My Heart Tells Me to Take

Jason Fairchild

THE SAND CANYON REVIEW



Oil on canvas



Oil on canvas

The Night
Aron Wiesenfeld

Icepop

Amber Easley

THE SAND CANYON REVIEW



Digital photography



Oil on canvas

The Promise You Made Me

Italia Ruotolo

Morning Glories

Claire McConaughy

THE SAND CANYON REVIEW



Oil on canvas



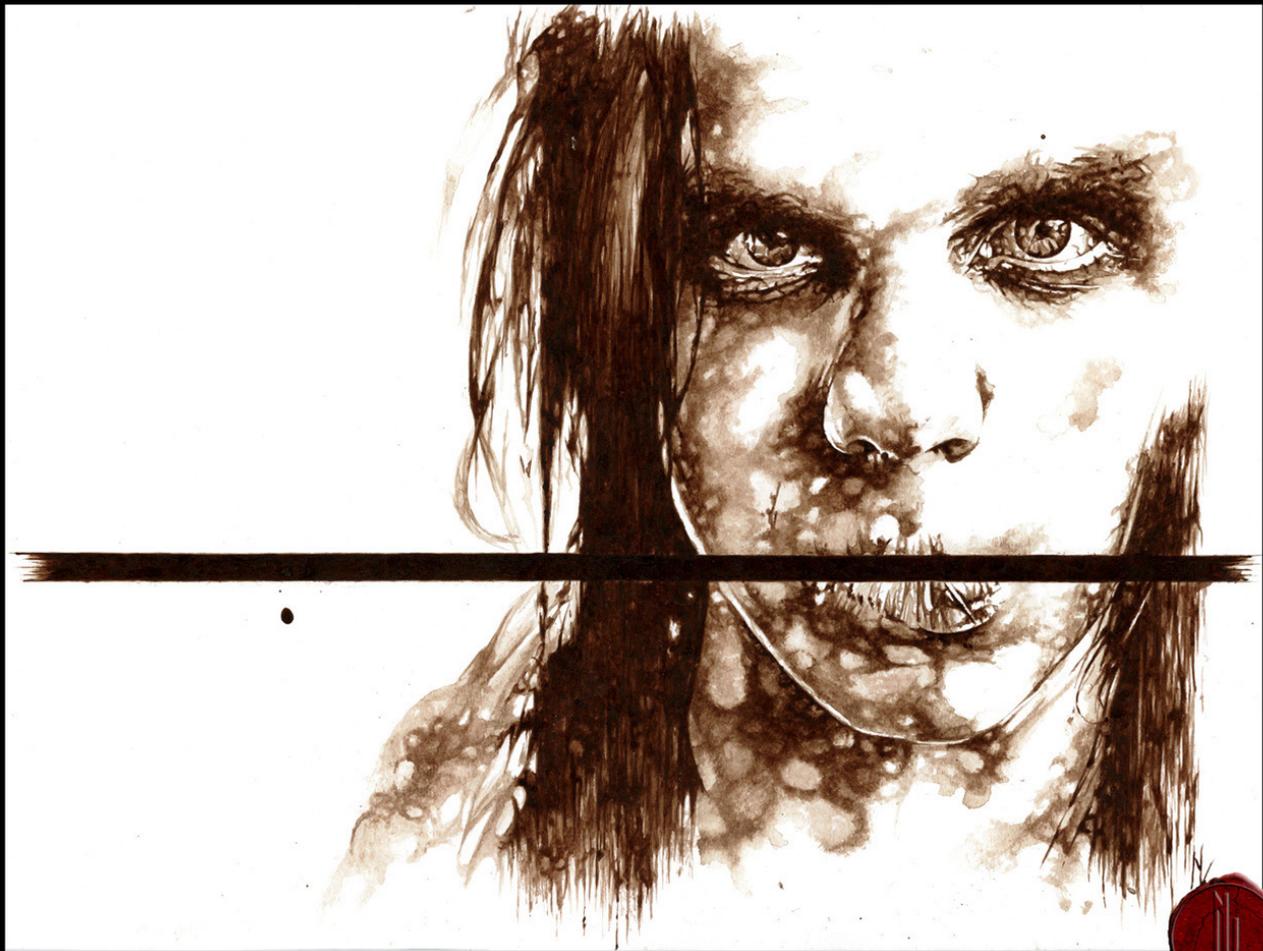
Digital photography

Naturally Inspired
Andreea Gheorghita

Solipsism

Nick Kushner

THE SAND CANYON REVIEW



SOLIPSISM
NICK KUSHNER © 2011 | BLOOD | 18" X 24"



T H E T H I R D A N G E L S O U N D E D . C O M

Blood



Oil on Belgian canvas

Bewitched Words in a Secret Garden

Italia Ruotolo

MYSTERIOUS WAYS



GAIL POTOCKI

COVER ARTIST

WRITTEN BY PAM DONAHUE

Gail Potocki has established a new benchmark in the world of environmental artists. She manages to summon the new and old into images that are modern and symbolically startling, yet rendered with the grace of the Old Masters. She mixes surrealism with the strength of current issues and devastations as adroitly as she applies oil to canvas in the elegant manner of the French and Belgian Symbolists of the 19th century.



“Thaw” Oil on linen



“Silence” Oil on linen

Potocki utilizes many familiar themes in her paintings, making them more accessible to the average viewer. She employs the drama of the sea, hovering bees, half-eaten apples, and the beauty of the female form, inviting us in to take a second or closer look. Once there, however, we discover that there is nothing soft-serve about her message. In her piece, “Thaw” (oil on linen, 2008) [left], Potocki portrays a beautiful woman melting atop warming polar icecaps, with oversized honeybees nearby. About the bees, Gail is quoted in *Hi-Fructose Magazine Online* (Nov. 2008): “I’ve addressed my concern with the plight of the honeybees quite a bit . . .



Cover image "Botanica No. 23" Oil on linen

The mysterious loss of such a huge percentage of the bee population is one of the most alarming collapses and seems to be happening so silently with little press or media concern. I wanted to show the importance of this issue by making the bees larger than life while meeting their death in mysterious ways that I have imagined.”

There is nothing quiet about what Potocki perceives to be the unaddressed ecological destruction symbolized in her paintings. In “Silence” (2001) [page 59 top right] she seamlessly interweaves the predominant theme in Symbolist art—silence itself—and uses it to give an unambiguous look at the disposition of humanity for environmental destruction and the ways in which it is covered up. The woman in the picture hushes the viewer as they look upon fire on the ocean, with dead and dying seabirds, slicked with oil, in a macabre array as they hang over an ocean-colored drape.

It is no surprise that Potocki found success early in her career. Shortly after graduating from the School of Representational Art in Chicago, she found her works being displayed in huge exhibits alongside such greats as Salvador Dali, H.R. Giger, and Ernest Fuchs. She continues to exhibit her exceptional talent worldwide.

The Sand Canyon Review is very happy to feature the work of Gail Potocki, and proudly welcomes her spectacular piece, “Botanica No. 23” as our cover art for the 2012 edition.

Pure Awakening

Manny Lopez

THE SAND CANYON REVIEW



Digital photography



THE IMMORALIST (SEUL CONTRE TOUS ; SELF PORTRAIT)
NICK KUSHNER © 2010 | BLOOD | 22" X 30"



T H E T H I R D A N G E L S O U N D E D . C O M

Blood

The Immortalist Seul Contre Tous Self Portrait

Nick Kushner

Convolution 42

Paolo C. Mejia

THE SAND CANYON REVIEW



Mixed media



Ink and acrylic on paper

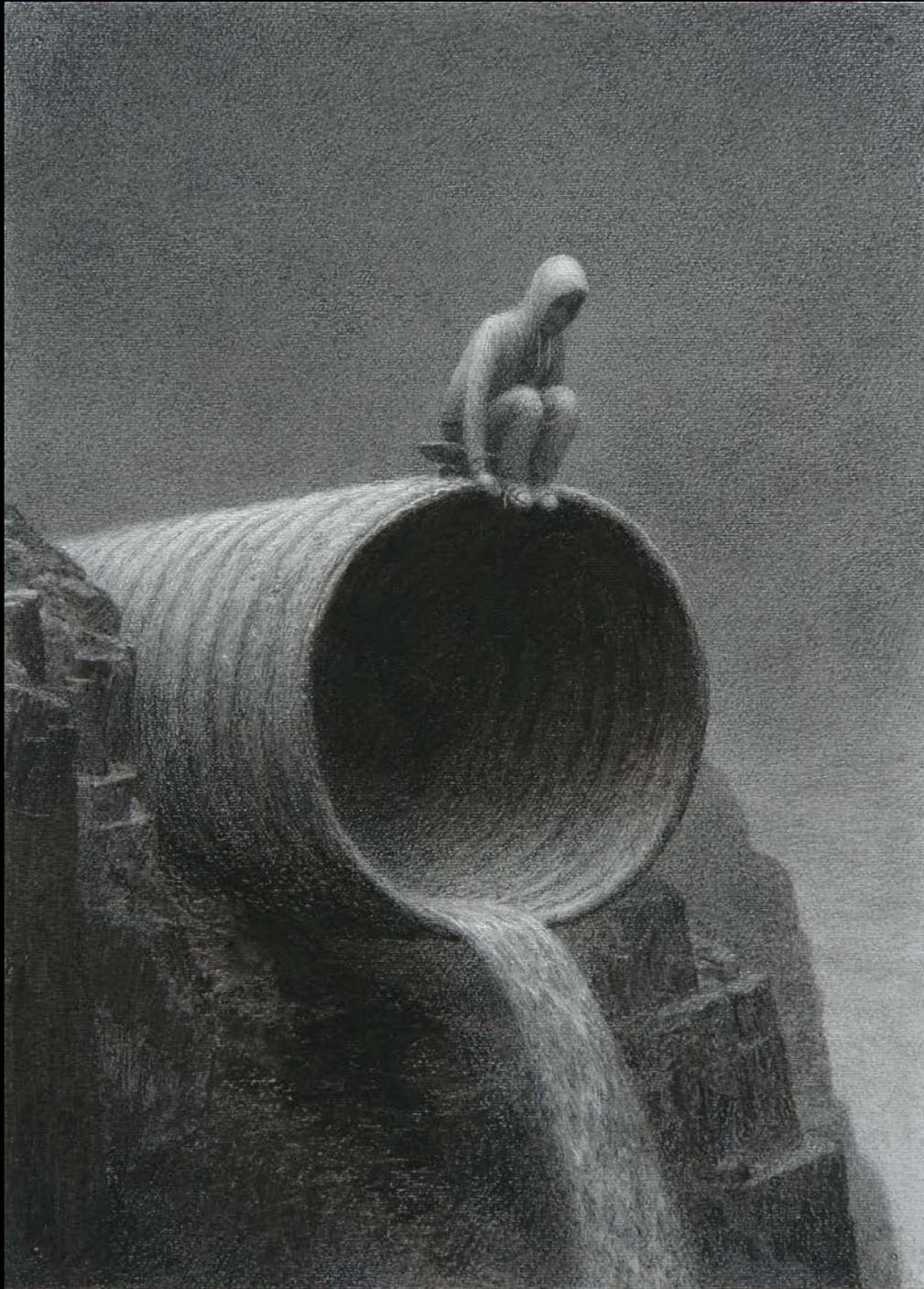
[Untitled]
Ivan de Monbrison

[Untitled]
James Barnes

THE SAND CANYON REVIEW



Acrylic on canvas



Charcoal on paper

Drain Pipe
Aron Wiesenfeld

MYTHS & LEGENDS



ALEXEY GOLOVIN

INTERVIEW BY COURTNEY BEAMESDERFER

Alexey Golovin has been featured in Bluecanvas magazine as well as other internationally acclaimed publications. His work has graced many museum walls, as well as private collections throughout Europe and around the world. It has been The Sand Canyon Review's great pleasure to present Alexey Golovin as this year's featured artist.

THE SAND CANYON REVIEW



"The Judgement of Paris" Oil on linen

Q: When did you first realize you wanted to pursue a career as an artist?

A: I was four years old when I decided to become an artist. My father was a professional artist and I grew up in his studio. There, I saw how he worked and how I wanted to be able to draw.

Q: Is there any message you are trying to convey in your artwork?

A: The main message: love for people.

Q: Where is your favorite place to go and think about, or plan, your artwork?

A: My favorite place is my studio. In the studio, I work quietly and no one bothers me.

I also love going to the Hermitage Museum. There are many paintings by the old masters at the Hermitage.

Q: What is your favorite medium to use? What other mediums have you tried using and which ones? What are the benefits of it?

A: I work mainly in oil on linen in the traditional manner and technology of the old masters, as I understand it.

I also paint in tempera. Tempera is wonderful stuff. I experimented with different mediums but, over time, developed my preferences.

I do not use factory-made canvases available in shops for my pictures. I take a linen cloth and turn it into the basis on which to paint in oils myself. It takes some extra time, but only in this way can I be sure of the integrity of my picture.



"The Birth of Venus" Oil on linen

Q: Your works look so real. Is there anyone or anything in particular that inspires you? Was there any particular teacher, mentor, or master who inspired you the most?

A: My constant source of inspiration is Greek mythology. It offers a huge number of subjects for an artist. In the history of art, there are many works on the themes of myths and legends. Artists of different countries and epochs addressed these subjects in their creative works.

I admire the paintings of the old masters. They contain everything that I like in painting, which induces me to be creative.

When selecting a classical subject for a picture, I try to make a new, modern interpretation. At the same time, I do not reject the traditional manner and techniques of painting.

Q: What's the best thing about being an artist? What's the worst?

A: The best thing about the artist's life is freedom. You have no superiors. If you want, you can go traveling. If you want, you can draw. There is a good chance that after death, people will remember that you lived on the planet. And the worst thing is, freedom is difficult to obtain.

Q: What would you be doing now if you were not an artist?

A: I would have chosen a creative profession. For example, an architect or car designer.

I think it is better for humans to be free to pursue creative professions. This is closer to what humanity is. All the rest will soon be done by robots.

Q: If you could give a young, aspiring artist some advice, what would you say?

A: Enjoy wine and women and don't be afraid, God has compassion (Omar Khayyam). But seriously... Look at the world positively! Look, imitate, copy; study all paintings you like, and stay individual. If a person wants to learn to paint, they must undergo hard labor in teaching. If you are assertive, you will succeed.

*“The main message:
love for people.”*

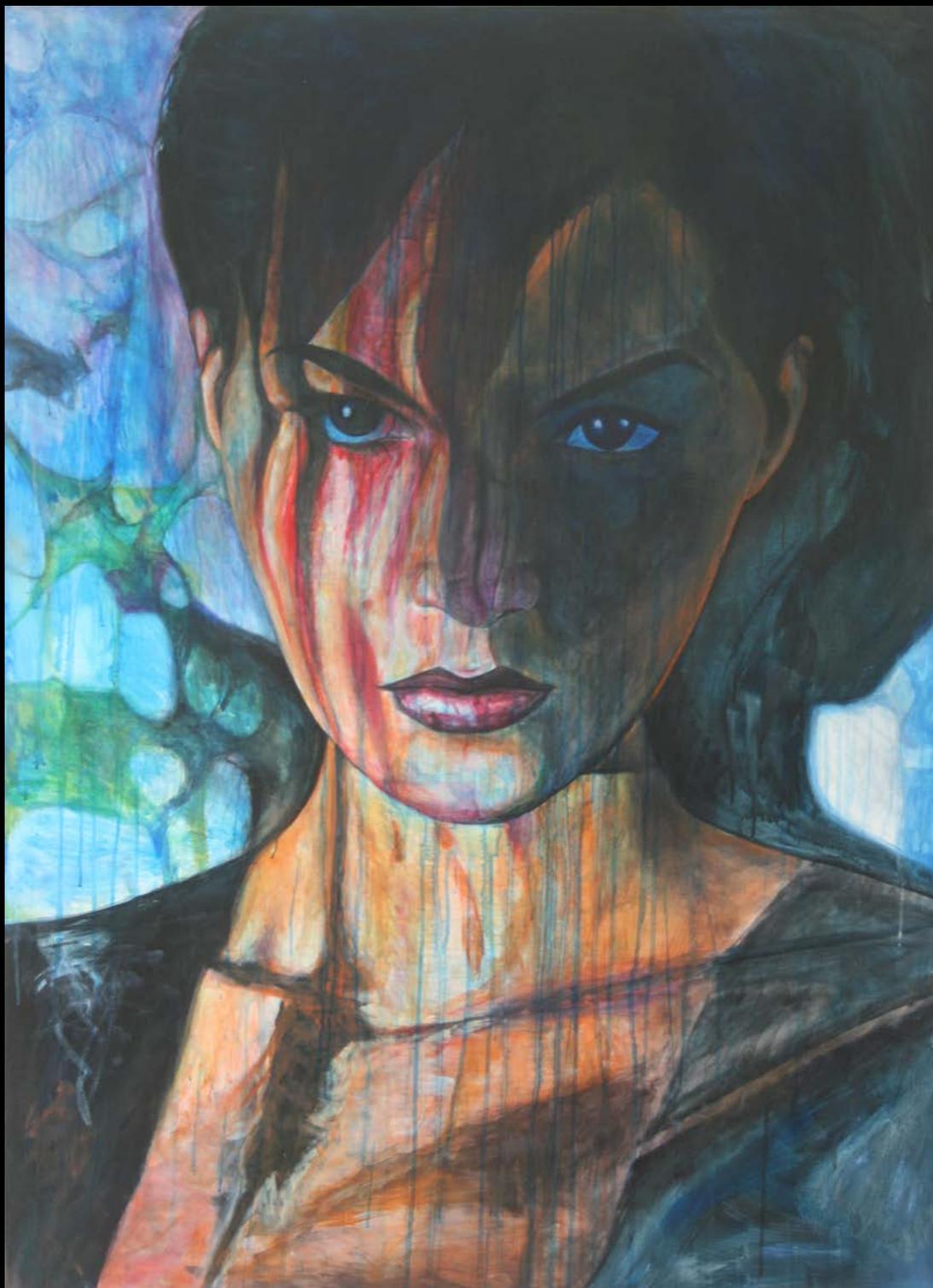


"Artemis" Oil on linen

Sunday Morning God in Your Eyes

Jason Fairchild

THE SAND CANYON REVIEW



Oil on canvas



Oil on wood

Raise Crows They'll Peck Your Eyes Out
Italia Ruotolo

Listening to an Angel

Dr. Ernest Williamson III

THE SAND CANYON REVIEW



Mixed media



Photography

Le Fleurs
Mary Ann Beyers

Beneath the Veneer

Stephen Albair

THE SAND CANYON REVIEW



Natural light 35mm inkjet print



Pencil drawing

The Lovers
Shay Belisle

F ICTION

*“There were those nights I sang
so hard and so loud I could taste
the blood in my throat. Days
where I asked myself: ‘How
many strokes does it take to paint
a mountain?’”*

—DYLAN FREUDE, *Messiah*

THE WORLD IS POETRY



LARRY EBY

INTERVIEW BY SERAH RHODES



As I stepped into the coffee shop, I scanned the room for someone who looked poetic. There was one person sitting to the side who was about the right age, but he looked like any guy in any coffee shop across America: T-shirt, jeans, and an electronic notebook. I'm not sure what I was expecting ... maybe the pensive, beatnik sort? It turned out this normal looking guy was writer and poet, Larry Eby. His large smile wiped the slate clean, and a new impression of poetry and writing began to form.

Q: Larry, you are a 24-year-old published poet and writer: tell me about yourself. How did you get to the here-and-now?

A: *I was born and raised in the Inland Empire. Yucaipa is where I grew up, where the rural and the suburban meet. I've become obsessed with that idea. There's something about weeds that can grow out of concrete that inspires me.*

Q: I think you'd have to be a poet to see the good in concrete and weeds. What about your education?

A: *I graduated from CSUSB with a Bachelor in Creative Writing - Fiction. Eventually I would like to teach college-level writing and analysis. I'm also interested in literary criticism and social theory, so it really depends on what I end up doing in my education. I currently have plans to attend CSUSB for my MFA in Poetry, and I've been thinking a lot about what I would like to study if I decided to try for a PhD. I'm trying to keep many paths open, so the future is a little mysterious.*

Q: What are you doing while waiting for the MFA program to begin, and where are you going long term?

A: *I'm a member of PoetryIE, an Inland Empire based poetry society. (I'm technically a co-founder, but let's not give titles to the blob of artists that now make up such a fluid and beautiful community). We run weekly workshops on Monday nights at Augie's in Redlands. My long-term goals include the development of PoetryIE into a center of literary progression, as well as establishing a career in the writing field. I'm currently editing my first novel, as well as piecing together my first collection of poetry.*

Q: Tell me more about literary progression. What's the difference between poetry a hundred years ago and now?

A: *During the Romantic period, poets wrote about grander things: the stars and the rings of Saturn. In the modern movement, poets began writing about everyday things. They wrote in a gritty, down-to-earth way about mundane things. Those of us involved with PoetryIE want to be a part of the next wave – post modernism poetry; I guess you might call it, which is to continue writing in that gritty, down to earth way and add to it the conversation of things that are meaningful to our generation. It's hard to tell where the trajectory of literature is heading, but if I were to make a guess, I would say it's going to continue on the same path downwards to the grittier parts of humanity, with a focus on what separates man from nature. I think, as we discover more and more*

about our current state of being, literature may reflect that, showing the animal underneath.

Q: I'm curious ... authors are often told: "Write what you know." Yet, as I began reading over your published work and those waiting to be, I found you have a wealth of characters, all from widely different cultures and points of view. Where do you find all these characters?

A: *I start with a person I know or someone I see – a quality that interests me, and then I amplify it. That's what I do with all my characters; they don't necessarily come from me, but I am usually familiar with something about them. Sometimes I have to research an idea in order to write about it, but usually it's a quality in someone I know or something I've actually seen.*

One day I saw a man on the side of the road with no legs; from that one moment came the poem called: "In the End It's Nature's Butchery" which was published in Welter Magazine in 2011. I also wrote a poem a long time ago entitled "Online Dating," but never found a home for it. It's about two people climbing a hillside, and it was actually the first time I felt like I wrote a poem. It was the first time I experimented with form, along with diction and multiple layers. It was a cool experience for sure.



ONLINE DATING

Downpour sloshed through the rut filled hillside,
 liberating the scattered rock from the subsoil
 that flowed through our boots
 where holes chafed open and baptized our
 filthy toenails
 like they gasped for a moment out
 of drowning, and with each step of ascension
 toward high-ground, we sunk deeper and slid, and tripped,
 sinking our teeth into
 the mire,
 like finger painted handprints
 spread and fickle.

I really like that! Thank you for sharing it with us.

Q: You seem quite adept at toggling between poetry and fiction — where do your poems and stories come from?

A: *I read an interesting idea in Reader's Digest a long time ago: An artist sees the world in words and paints them; a writer sees the world in images and puts it into words on paper.*

The world is poetry: Each event is poetry.

Q: Is the event poetry, or is it something a poet sees and translates into poetry for the rest of us to read?

A: *No, the world is poetry:*

An event occurs ... a poet sees it, then deconstructs it and puts it into words on paper. We read the words, reconstruct the event, and then experience it. That is poetry: All of that must happen in order to have poetry:

Q: That's really beautiful, and such a great way of seeing it. Have you always been a writer and poet? Were you the little kid who carried around a notebook full of scribbled stories?

A: *No, but I did create a game when I was little and ended up writing the backstory for all the characters. It was then I knew I liked writing stories. In high school I wrote the 'angst' kind of poetry but put it away because it wasn't cool to write poems. One year in particular, Mr. Martin, my English teacher, gave us free-write Friday: I could write anything I wanted: I didn't like school, so that was a good thing.*

But I originally found my love for poetry in Ezra Pound's "In a Station of the Metro." There is something in this small poem constructed of two short lines that speaks beyond our comprehension. To me, the poem speaks to man's harsh relationship with the natural world. The problem isn't discovering that we are ultimately doomed if we continue on our current, destructive path, but the problem is feeling it, grasping that reality, and being moved to the point of change. You could even go so far to say that the lack of more lines shows the insignificance of both our ecosystem and man, since eventually, if you follow the line to the end, you'll see nothingness."

Q: You mentioned editing your first novel? Did I hear you correctly in saying you wrote it in a month? Did you already have the outline of the story, the characters developed, and the framework in place? You couldn't really start from scratch and write it in 30 days, could you?

A: *The novel in a month thing is called NaNoWriMo: National Novel Writing Month; you can find them at nanowrimo.org. It's a national event that happens every November. This last November was my first go at it, and I actually did finish the novel during the event. I began with a simple idea and I wrote every day, sometimes for a few hours and other times all day. The story just unfolded as I wrote.*

Q: You're a normal enough guy and yet a prolific writer and poet do you think anyone can be a poet? Can regular people be poets too?

A: *If you're dedicated to poetry, then you're a poet! I'd like to be that guy who can draw a line in the sand and say that people who just write for "fun" step away from the poet's side. But that's not true. I think even the person who writes a few lines in their notebook every year could be considered a poet. They were a poet when they wrote those lines down, so did they just stop being a poet when the notebook was pushed under the bed? There is something that compels a poet to write, and for some that moment is rare.*

It doesn't make that moment any less special. But a poet I would rather read is someone who is dedicated to poetry. They scour the world learning from each of its corners, trying to poke a hole in the curtain. They pull poetry out of the room, instead of waiting for it to fall from the ceilings.

Larry Eby, thank you for giving us a glimpse into how you, as a writer and poet, see things. Hopefully your novel will be in the bookstore window sooner than even you could imagine.



“I start with a person I know or someone I see – a quality that interests me, and then I amplify it. That’s what I do with all my characters; they don’t necessarily come from me, but I am usually familiar with something about them. Sometimes I have to research an idea in order to write about it, but usually it’s a quality in someone I know or something I’ve actually seen.”



Certified

Anna Mantzaris

I had thirty days to get happy. I needed to transform myself from a moody, melancholy, cranky complainer into an off-the-happiness charts type of woman by August 1, my fortieth birthday. I had known the date was approaching, but the arrival of the certified letter sent a wave of very unhappy panic down my already ornery spine.

Dear Janet (ID#: UNHAP-0654):

This is official notice of your impending due date for Happiness testing. Report to the pick up location of Kessler and 9th Streets at 10:00 a.m., August 1. You will be transported via official vehicle to an undisclosed testing site. In accordance with the law, failure to do so will result in immediate disqualification of potential happiness status and further action will be taken.

The letter was signed:

Ronald C. Martin #HAP-3245

Happiness Testing Coordinator

Like all citizens, documentation and correspondence had been sent from the Happiness Board since my birth. I had received a perfunctory annual visit that consisted of a man in a bright-yellow jumpsuit simply glimpsing at me and checking off the “Still Unhappy” box on his clipboard. My parents had both requested early testing in their twenties and had received record high marks. They had always been

“I had even started to suspect that my daughter had sent in evidence of my unhappy state including empty Cadbury bar wrappers and a copy of my bill for my life-long subscription to Cantankerous Quarterly.”

secure in the fact that they were happy deep down to their tickled-pink bones. My siblings were so confident in their carefree giddiness that the subject of passing to official Happiness Level never came up at our on-cloud-nine dinner table discussions.

I had gone from one über-happy house to the next. My husband Breck pre-qualified as a teenager due to a never-seen-before high content of bliss, and my thirteen-year old daughter Sabrina, was a member of the Early Happiness league. Throughout my life, I had chugged along as a malcontent, knowing I would someday have to prove myself as a happy person, yet a combination of inertia and gloominess (with side effects of dry mouth, blurred vision, fatigue, nausea, dizziness, and aching joints) had prevented me from taking any action.

Although I didn't have access to my State-of-mind file that would be carefully reviewed along with my test score, I had been informed that damaging pieces of information had been collected throughout the years, including a video of me yelling at the salad-by-the-pound buffet worker because I had inadvertently stacked my plate high with weighty marinated blocks of tofu for what I thought was chopped chicken. There was audio documentation of me suggesting there were "grade-school shenanigans" going on at the company that insured my Honda hatchback. I had even started to suspect that my daughter had sent in evidence of my unhappy state including empty Cadbury bar wrappers and a copy of my bill for my life-long subscription to *Cantankerous Quarterly*. I knew she had done this to get herself in with the committee. My daughter was a happiness climber and as a parent, I felt proud, yet also deceived.

I had let the unhappy years tick away and I was now not only despondent and depressed, but desperate. Everyone knew that drugs of any sort were forbidden, so I decided I would enroll myself in an unofficial self-proclaimed Happiness Boot Camp that I deemed "Operation Pleased as Punch." I would reinvent myself as a happy person, stat.

During that next month I used exclamation points. I baked cupcakes and frosted them with pastel icing. I wore dangly fruit earrings and hired a life coach. I whitened my teeth and got laser eye surgery. I adopted not one, but two cute puppies. I generated gobs of extra cash with a mail order honey ham business, and got an APR rate of 0% on my MasterCard. I remodeled our house with help from HGTV and bought a Mini Cooper. I wore polka dots, had derma

abrasion, and visited an Ashram. My husband and I married again and I conceived twins. I created and used Happy flashcards with pictures of happy places, happy people, and happy words on them. To the untrained happiness eye, I appeared to be a very happy woman.

After a few weeks, I began to feel almost good, yet as the day of my testing grew closer, my confidence level began to gradually diminish for no specific reason and I took on feelings of worthlessness, a familiar and oddly comforting sensation. No, I certainly wasn't happy, but wasn't this the best I'd been in years? I hoped they scored on a curve.

The morning of the test, I dressed carefully for the occasion, deciding that a palette of bright colors would just give off a fake joyful vibe. Instead, I chose a modest suit and pinned on a "blue bird" broach, hoping my outfit would show that I was an upstanding citizen and happiness lurked somewhere within my cloudy soul. Breck made me a breakfast of buckwheat pancakes shaped as sunflowers. Sabrina tentatively gave me a hand-made card that read, "Good luck, Mom" hoping I wouldn't notice the small note scrawled on the back that read: *In no way does this card endorse the receiver or her crabby opinions.*

Breck dropped me off at the designated spot. "Have a great day!" he said as he pulled away from the curb. We had never discussed the possibility that I might not return. I was a few minutes early and as I stood on the sunny, tree-lined street listening to the birds chirp, I imagined myself sitting in an institutional gray cinderblock room being interrogated under fluorescent lights. As I checked my watch, a small yellow mini bus appeared. It was painted with large 70's style smiley faces. I had imagined a more discreet vehicle. I wasn't blindfolded or given any orders. I was simply asked to show my Identification card and board. I was the only passenger and given a tropical fruit snack and bottled water for what I was told would be a forty-minute drive.

As we crossed town and got on the interstate I began to review everything I had done in the last month. I ran my hand along my smooth skin and took out a pocket mirror to check my sparkling teeth. I quizzed myself with my flashcards and did some yoga breathing in my seat. I quickly lost track of which direction we were headed and it wasn't until the driver said, "We're here," that I realized the destination: The Mall of

America.

I was politely instructed to enter the mall through one of the North entrance points and proceed to the second-floor food court. I went through the revolving glass doors

and took in the loud chatter. Everyone was fat, happy, and carrying H&M bags. I had never imagined such a public setting for the test. I sat at one of the plastic sticky tables attached to a chair and surveyed the surface that was covered with remnants of a meal from the Great Steak & Potato Company.

Moments later, I was caught off guard when a short woman carrying a Tommy Bahama's bag tapped me on the shoulder and asked for my identification number. She was wearing mom jeans and a Curves sweatshirt. She gave me a large smile and said her name was Shirley. Her accent included a slight Southern twang. I was nervous, but still couldn't help but wonder if I might have time for an egg roll from Panda Express before we got started.

Shirley sat down across from me. "There's just one question for you, Janet," she said.

I took a deep breath and inhaled the scent of Cinnabon.

"You have thirty seconds to answer," Shirley announced, setting a plastic kitchen timer designed as a squirrel going after a nut.

She smiled and took out her pen. "Ready?"

"Yes," I told her.

She spoke slowly and clearly, over-annunciating each word. "What makes someone happy?" she said, ready to jot my answer down in a purple notebook shaped as a high heel, incrustated with rhinestones.

A blur of the past month filled my head. Images of smiling babies, beach balls, birthday cakes, and roller coasters flashed before my eyes. I tried to picture myself lounging in the south of France. I imagined myself at an Eco-spa being pampered in the jungle. I thought about Valrhona chocolate. I tried to remember the lyrics to every happy song I had forced myself to listen to, yet nothing came to me.

"I had let the unhappy years tick away and I was now not only despondent and depressed, but desperate."

“This is your last chance,” said Shirley, placing her pen down.”

“Fifteen seconds,” Shirley said.

My mind was a blank.

“Ten seconds.”

I looked up and saw what appeared to be a large Midwestern family approaching me. It was a group of ten, including three children. Most were dressed in jeans and T-shirts, yet a couple of the women wore sundresses. They surrounded the table.

“This is your last chance,” said Shirley, placing her pen down.

From across the food court, I imagined we looked like an extended family gathering for an annual reunion, ready to head for a picnic where we would stuff ourselves with three types of potato salad and talk about our lives, leaving out the sordid affairs, financial problems, and addictive tendencies.

“One second,” said Shirley.

Sitting in a mall with its own zip code, large enough to hold thirty-two Boeing 747's, a place that sold more than 2,000 hot dogs a day, I looked at Shirley and the others. I realized I might never see my husband and daughter again. A sense of intense regret for being so unhappy for so long washed over me.

“Janet!”

As hard as I tried, no words would come. I took a deep breath and gave her the biggest smile I knew how.

The Trashy Story of Orion St.

Isaac R. Escalera

The black and blue trash cans were lined up and down Orion St. as if they were standing guard before their tract homes. The morning dew settled on top of their lids and beaded down the sides onto the asphalt road. It was garbage day and like every garbage day, so Paul would be coming around soon. He wasn't dangerous, though children tended to keep their distance from the man like everyone did. At best, strangers would wave to him, but they would never stop to have a conversation with him. Paul wasn't offended. In fact, he hardly noticed it. He was more interested in going through their trashcans on collection days and picking out the recyclables and the occasional item useful to himself. This was how Paul acquired his am/fm radio he wore clipped to the waist of his jeans. The mechanism that played the cassette tapes had long been broken, but that was all right with Paul. It picked up local radio stations just fine.

Paul didn't live on Orion St., but his morning ritual of trash-digging and salvaging had caused him to know the neighborhood even better than those who lived there, in some ways. Orion St. is a cul-de-sac, a small corner of a suburban community. If you were to place it on a map, it would be on the bottom left, nearly falling off the page. Because of this, the garbage collectors do not come to Orion St. as quickly as they do the other streets and avenues, parkways and drives. This gave Paul enough time to separate the things that could be saved from the things that were rubbish.

Paul believed that the man that lived in the first house of Orion lived alone. Parked in the driveway was a greasy pickup truck with all the signs of someone who was a construction worker or some sort of manual laborer. There was a tool box, a dirty paint bucket of god-knows-what, and a stray glove separated from its comrade. This house never produced a lot of regular household trash, but sometimes it had some interesting garbage. Paul once found a wardrobe of ex-military garb here. He tried on the field jacket, which was too snug around his stomach for his liking, and the name Lopez that ran across the left side of his chest served as a reminder that he was in another man's clothes. He had put the clothing back that day and took the beer cans left there instead. As the weeks went by, there seemed to be less and less trash

and more and more beer cans and drained bottles of hard liquor. Paul noticed this, and today there were more bottles than ever. He picked the bottles out and placed them with the others he had collected from the street. He opened the trash and began to rummage through its contents.

Tossed on top of the second garbage can was a pile of mail. Judging by its size, Paul concluded that the man who lived here, Lopez, must have let the pile accumulate for some time. Paul imagined the growing stack on a kitchen table, surrounded by beer cans, some half full. Paul was hesitant to look at the letters at first, but he reminded himself that they were garbage anyway and he wasn't stealing anything. Still, he found himself feeling the way he did when he tried on the field jacket. Nevertheless, he continued and, as expected, it was mostly junk mail. Credit card companies and banks offering *5% cash back year round* and *0% intro APR until 2013*. Others were a bit more mysterious with words like *urgent* and *time sensitive material*. There was a letter addressed by hand to the man, Lopez, which caught Paul's eye. He picked it up, examining its unopened and preserved shape. It had a return address from the local V.F.W., and on the back of the envelope where it was glued shut were the words *Welcome Home*.

Paul looked around to see if anyone was watching him, and when he felt sure no one was watching him, he slipped the letter into his pocket, picked up his trash bags of recyclables and proceeded on his way.

The next house was a bit more promising; it belonged to a young couple who drove his and hers cars. The cars were nothing fancy, but the couple was always well dressed on the mornings Paul saw them leaving their home. Paul's sister called these types of homes D.I.N.K's (dual-income-no-kids). For the past month Paul had only seen the man's car parked in the driveway. Paul suspected something had happened to the couple, and his suspicions were confirmed when he salvaged a few picture frames with the photos still inside from the garbage can. They sat on top of a pile of half-empty take-out containers. Today a queen size mattress with a sign that read "you haul it, you keep it -- FREE" was leaning against the curb. Paul looked at the mattress. It was definitely used, but in fairly good shape. When he looked hard enough he could see the left side was sunken in more than the right, the result of a heavier

body wearing down the springs. He imagined the man and the woman, lying there facing each other, picture frames still on the night stands. He imagined them eating their takeout in their bed and wondered if this is what they chose over starting a family.

Paul stared at the mattress and listed the possibilities of what would happen next in his head. Maybe she'd come back. Maybe she wouldn't, and he'd be forced to rent to someone like an old frat brother. Or maybe he would eventually sell the house.

It was impossible to tell. For now the home provided a steady supply of soda cans, beer cans, glass beer bottles, and odds and ends that used to belong to the D.I.N.Ks and now belonged to Paul and his sister's household.

Paul neither was, nor ever had been, homeless. He was the youngest of four children. The oldest was a victim of sudden infant death syndrome. The next oldest was his brother Gemini, whom his parents believed was the spirit brother of their passed son. Gemini was neither a twin nor a Gemini. Shortly after high school, Gemini moved to Chicago and changed his name to George. Paul and his sister, Zora, were the next in line and were actual twins. Paul's real name was Polaris, after the North Star. His sister excelled in school but Paul was different – not as socially developed as his sister. If he had been born today, he would have surely been labeled with abbreviations containing S's and D's and S's with D's. Their mother had left their father when they were young. She raised them right and true and kept watch over Paul until the day she died. He moved in with Zora and her husband, who accepted Paul and his recycling enterprise into their home.

Paul continued walking down the cul-de-sac to the next house. It was home to a large family containing a mom, dad, four boys, and a dog. He knew this because of the sticker on the back of the mini-van depicting a mom, dad, four boys, and a dog. One of the sticker children was missing a leg and the father was missing an arm. Paul briefly wondered if their son was actually missing a leg or the father an arm.

The mother at this house was not very fond of Paul's trash digging practice. She had called the police numerous times, but to no avail. Trash cans set outside, past the side walk were considered public property. At worst, Paul could be cited for vandalism but seeing as he never made a mess, the sheriff's department could do nothing to accuse him of such wrong-doings.

The boys would leave their bicycles out leaning against the garage, and their street hockey gear, which included roller blades, hockey sticks, and a hockey net made of PVC piping, out on the lawn. The woman, however, was only concerned about what was in the trash cans. The truth of the matter was that they contained nothing exciting at all. Empty boxes of frozen instant dinners, half eaten food, what looked like junk mail that had been run through a paper shredder, and piles and piles of packaging from granola bars, pop tarts, pudding cups, string cheese, burritos, crustless peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, fruit cups, and square plastic sheets from individually sliced cheese. It never ceased to amaze Paul how much food could be prepackaged. He could remember grocery shopping as a kid, but he could not recall how much food was packaged like this. Unfortunately for Paul, anything worth recycling here was already sorted and kept away by the boys to redeem.

Paul left the house empty-handed. He thought about his mother grocery shopping. He thought about a song she would sing.

*Little boxes on the hillside,
Little boxes made of ticky tacky;
Little boxes on the hillside,
Little boxes all the same.*

The song worked its way from his memory to his mouth, where he began to hum the lines over and over as he passed the next house, which was vacant and had been for some time now. Every now and then, the bank or whatever lender that found itself in possession of the home would contract someone to come and clean out the house and maintain the lawn for open houses. Needless to say, the ones who cleaned the house would take whatever useful items were left behind for themselves, and only throw out what was truly useless.

Paul pressed on to the next house on the cul-de-sac, a single story home with a patio full of gaudy knick-knacks and a couple of mismatched chairs. Paul knew this house. An old school friend of his sister's lived here with her young daughter who, though only a toddler, was already a bold symbol of femininity in her sundresses picking dandelions and grass with her tiny fingers. His sister's friend, whose name he had forgotten, had a round face and carried the extra weight

from her newfound motherhood. Regardless of this, she was a pretty woman with soft features and a pleasant smile. The trash was much the same from this house: discarded food, sales papers, prepackaged baby food containers, and a constant heap of dirty diapers. What Paul found interesting were the amounts of magazines -- the kind that floated Hollywood gossip and portrayed pictures of impossibly thin models, young actresses, and starlets whose only claim to fame was fame itself. The magazines were not only read, they were studied. Pictures were circled and pages were dog-eared or completely torn out. An obsession, Paul thought.

The last house was a single story home with a well-manicured lawn and an American flag rippling in the breeze. Even though it was the suburbs, Paul couldn't help but think of amber waves of grain and purple mountain's majesty, though he had never seen either one. The old pickup truck in the driveway was stickered, but tastefully, Paul thought. *Pow*Mia* on the driver's side and *Semper Fi* on the other. Amongst the useful refuse of this house were plastic milk and orange juice cartons. There was always an abundance of newspaper and though it was recyclable, it was also not worth very much. Paul needed a good sized stack to make any money and the honest truth was that it would be just too heavy for him to haul around.

Paul gathered the last of his collection and walked over to the mailbox in front of the house which, like the lawn, was the best kept. He reached into his pocket and recovered the letter from the V.F.W. He stood there momentarily; looking at the letter and at the flag before he placed it inside of the mailbox. He thought perhaps the man living here would see the wrong address and personally return it to its rightful owner, the man he called Lopez. He was sure this man was from a different time, a time when words like "community" still meant something ... even on quiet streets like Orion.

Paul tapped the mailbox a few times with his finger tips, picked up the things he had salvaged, and continued on to the next block.

Errand of Mercy

Alexa Berryhill

It was early as I stared out the window and sipped my hot chocolate. The trees swayed slightly in what I knew was frigid air; the paper reported the first freeze. I, however, stood right below the heater and was content to stay there.

“What’s the story, morning glory?” His warm lips pressed against my cheek.

“Oh, hey dear,” I answered, passing a cup of hot coffee into Ti’s hand. He blew across the top and then slurped it, making as much noise as possible.

“Mmm,” he sighed, throwing his head back with a flair. “Black, just the way I like it.” He shrugged. “You know how I do. You making breakfast?”

“Sure,” I said, opening the cabinet and pulling out a skillet. “What you want?”

“Um, two eggs over easy, please?”

“Soi-tanly,” I nodded. He kissed my cheek as he skipped out of the kitchen and down the stairs. I took the carton out of the refrigerator and cracked two eggs into a bowl.

His name was Tiberius Elton Woods – his father had been a “Trekker,” or one of those deeply consumed by Star Trek, and his mother had been a devotee of Jane Austen. Oddly, the combination of the two was relevant in him; he was a science-fiction writer. I imagined him now, sitting in the office downstairs, a pencil behind his ear and fingers outstretched gingerly over the keyboard.

The sound of Led Zeppelin echoed up the stairs; he was writing a murder sequence. I always knew what was happening by the music he played. If it was soulful jazz, it was a love scene. When he got the Led out, it was a murder scene. If it was swelling instrumental sounds, it was always an epic battle in the works. Pop music usually meant it was a good morning for the characters. This script he was working on now was a thriller about a hit man on a foreign planet sent to murder his sister’s husband, the viceroy. I’m never really sure where he gets the ideas

from, but a small publishing company always buys them and begs him for more.

We had been married for six years after we were only

engaged for a month, dating two months before that. I guess we just knew, as they say in movie land. We met at a writers' convention where he was trying to get someone to buy his latest work and I was photographing the event for a local magazine. He worked at the bank during the week verifying checks in a corner of the basement. It was a very unsocial job, but he didn't mind because it gave him time to dream of his characters and their adventures. I taught photography and yearbook at the high school, getting paid \$1000 a week just to upload at least five pictures to my blog on the side. I did weddings, engagements, babies, and everything else a family could ever want - the babies were the hardest for me.

“Our Chinese and Ethiopian babies died before the paperwork was all in order.”

Ti and I kept our first two years to ourselves while we traveled across the country, writing and taking pictures. We lived as modestly as possible to save money for our house and children. After his first manuscript was accepted, he decided it was time he could settle down. We rented a small apartment in Seattle and tried for a year to have a baby. Nothing happened.

The doctors called it unexplained infertility. We were both young and there was nothing physically wrong. They said it could be stress, so we moved to Ruidoso - close enough to both our families, but far enough so that we didn't have to see them every day. I didn't want to see his mother often because she cried every time she realized her son's ginger hair wouldn't be carried out through us. It made me sad too - I loved Ti's ginger fluff.

Fostering was something we attempted, but it was too hard when we had to let the children go - either to an adoptive family or their rehabilitated parents. We had been a part of the adoption cycle for three years with four failed attempts. Our Chinese and Ethiopian babies died before the paperwork was all in order, and the twins we tried to adopt from Chicago were found by their mother. The little boy from Seattle went missing. Ti joked we were cursed.

We were ready for children, though. With the money we had saved up

and a hefty inheritance from my great aunt, we bought a three-story townhome on a resort golf course. The front door was on the first floor, but we lived on the second floor where the kitchen, living room, and master bedroom were. Our two golden retrievers, Luna and Neville, had their own room, even though they slept in our room on their dog beds. The calico cat, Frodo, frolicked wherever he liked, but he was too self-important to keep company with the rest of us. Our families and friends could come and stay whenever they wanted with plenty of space for them. There was lots of room for toy trucks and trains and Barbie dolls, but we had no reason for them yet.

The eggs sizzled and popped as I added salt and pepper, and I turned to throw the empty egg carton away. I sighed seeing that the trashcan was full and pulled out the bag.

“Ti! Your eggs are ready,” I yelled, flipping them onto a plate. I heard the music stop and his steps as he bounded up the stairs.

“You’re not going to eat?”

“I’m going to make some oatmeal and stuff in just a minute,” I answered. “I’ll take the trash out first.”

“I can take it out,” he said, picking his hoodie up off the table. I yanked the hoodie from his hand and pulled it over my head. I lifted the bag again and tied the top.

“If I’m not back in two minutes, send a search party,” I joked. He smiled, sitting at the bar. I scuttled back downstairs, dropping the black

“There was lots of room for toy trucks and trains and Barbie dolls, but we had no reason for them yet.”

bag by the door. I pulled on my boots and opened the door, shivering as I did.

Luna trampled down the stairs as she heard the door open, racing to my side with a bark. We headed across the street to the dumpster, and I tossed the bag over the side. It was incredibly cold today, colder than it had been. Luna ran across the grass of the golf course, chasing the ducks into the scenic pond. She barked, her tongue hanging out as she

“I saw the lump and began to run. The thing was moving, whatever it was.”

ran back to me. She put her nose to the gravel and started to run around. I dipped my hands into the pocket of the hoodie, waiting for Luna to have her fun. She skipped

around our cul-de-sac bordering the pond, sniffing eagerly. She charged up the road towards the visitors’ center and club area. I walked after her listlessly, knowing she would return eventually if I lost her. When I reached the top of the hill, she was sniffing around the once red door at the old Methodist chapel. The building had a quaint appearance, though now it was only used for the occasional wedding or photo opportunity. An unusual lump rounded the bottom step and Luna pawed it with a sniff.

“What is it, girl?” I said, walking towards her. I saw the lump and began to run. The thing was moving, whatever it was. Luna pressed her nose to it gently, and it began to cry. I reached out for it, my hand trembling.

The baby stared up at me with wet and bright blue eyes. A bluish little hand poked out of the thin blanket and wrapped itself around my finger.

“Piss!”

I scooped the bundle up in my arms, staring at the thing. It wailed, closing its eyes.

“How did you get out here?”

I remembered then that I was standing outside in the cold, just in my pajamas and that this baby was just in a thin blanket. I tucked it closer to my body and ran inside.

“Ti! Ti! Ti!” I yelled, kicking the door closed with my foot.

“What? What? What?” he echoed, sprinting from upstairs.

“What do we do?”

“What?!”

“What do we do with the baby?” I asked, cradling it in my arms. Ti strained his neck around to see the tiny face of baby.

“Where did you get that?”

“It was left at the old chapel,” I answered. “Luna found it.”

As if she heard her name she barked as Neville scratched at the inside of

the door behind us.

“Oh, Luna!” I cried, pulling the door open. The dog ran in and sniffed at my arms.

“Just at the old chapel?”

“Yeah,” I answered, “just lying there on the steps, wrapped in this blanket. Maybe you should call Rob?”

“Yeah,” he nodded, “I’ll call Rob.”

Ti ran down the hall to the office, and he appeared again with the phone up to his ear. I slowly pulled the blanket away from the baby; it was clean and small—a girl. The umbilical cord was still attached, and she was shivering. She had thin light brown hair on her head and an adorable button nose. She sobbed again, rolling her head the other way.

“Lucyfoundababy!” he said.

“Slow down,” I laughed, as her hand wrapped around my finger again.

“Lucy found at it the chapel,” he said slowly. “No man, we didn’t kidnap it! You know we’re better than that. What do we do?”

I walked to the guest bedroom, taking one of the extra blankets from the closet. I pulled it around her, and this time she seemed to smile.

“Happy little baby,” I said, lightly touching her nose. She opened her eyes.

“He says we should go to the hospital and he’ll meet us there,” Ti said, peeking his head into the room. I nodded, and followed him out the door as he grabbed the keys from the bowl and stepped into his tennis shoes. He opened the passenger door. I climbed in with her in my arms, cradling her with the left and pulling the seatbelt across my body. Ti started the car, turning the knob on the heater all the way up. He backed out the driveway as we started the ten-minute drive to the hospital.

* * *

The police car was already there as we pulled up, and Rob jumped out of his vehicle, his uniform as spotless as ever. He pointed us to the door underneath

“I saved her life, why should I give her up? Why shouldn’t I be able to keep her?”

the ER overhang, and followed us in.

“You found it at the old chapel?”

“Yeah, just sitting on the steps,” I answered. “Luna found her. Nobody was around, and she was just in this little blanket lying there.”

Rob waved a nurse over, and the plump woman eyed us curiously.

“Good morning, Robert,” she answered. “What brings you in?”

“We have an abandoned baby,” he said, using his elbow to gesture towards her. She began to cry, and I instinctively rocked her back and forth.

“You sure she doesn’t belong to the two of them?”

“YES!” Ti and I both shouted at the same time. Ti shrugged, almost unconsciously.

“We wouldn’t be giving *our baby* away,” he snapped.

“Alright, alright,” the nurse nodded, “don’t mean to offend.”

“You know what? Where’s Dr. Davis?” Rob said.

The nurse narrowed her eyes and crossed her arms. “I’ll go get her.”

“You know Melissa Davis,” Rob explained, “she goes to our church.”

“Of course,” I said.

“She’ll be nicer,” Rob said.

A thin brown haired woman came from at the end of the long white and blue hallway. She smiled at Rob as the plump nurse’s mouth moved emphatically with words.

“Hi Rob, Ti, Lucy,” she smiled at us. “Follow me.”

She led the four of us into the second room on the right; the blinds were closed on the other rooms. She held her hand under the sanitizer dispenser and rubbed her palms together.

“May I?” she asked, her arms outstretched.

My arms tightened around the girl. I didn’t know her, but I didn’t want to give her up. For fifteen minutes, she had been undisputedly mine.

I saved her life, why should I give her up? Why shouldn’t I be able to keep her? Ti and I are capable, right?

Ti patted my shoulder, and I reluctantly laid her into Melissa’s arms. She pulled off the large blanket and studied the baby carefully.

“Tell me how you found her,” she said.

“I took the trash out,” I began, “and our dog just took off up the hill, so I went to go look. And there she was at the old chapel, just like that.”

“About how long have you had her?”

“Not longer than half an hour,” Ti answered as I crossed my arms.

“She looks no older than six hours old,” Melissa said, “very young. Amazing you found her alive she’s very cold.”

“I know,” I said, watching the doctor lift the baby’s arms and look them over.

“No signs of neglect other than the fact of abandonment,” she continued. She looked back at us and nodded once, holding the baby towards me.

I took her, resting her head against my chest.

“I’ll go get one of the pedi-nurses and a bottle,” she said, “Rob, you might want to tell the desk to make sure no woman comes in with abdominal pain or bleeding or anything of the sort. They’ll know. And maybe send out a call to the other local clinics in the area.”

Rob nodded once and followed her out the door.

“You know we can’t keep her,” Ti answered, peering over my shoulder to stare at the small thing.

“I know,” I said, “it just seems so right, you know like she fell out of the sky.”

“Can I?”

“Of course, dear,” I nodded as he stretched out his own arms. I sat down on the immaculate bed.

“Gah, she’s so pretty,” he said, “look at those eyes.”

He began to bob his arms gently, cooing as he did. “What a pretty little girl you are. Yes, yes.”

I smiled, watching as he babbled to the little one in his arms. He walked gingerly around the room, showing her the surroundings. I stared, his semi-muscular arms wrapped around the tiny person. We were dressed the same, still in our pajamas, glasses and hair pretty much a mess.

He looked at me, the smile disappearing from his face.

“We can try again with the adoption thing,” he said, “Who knows, maybe they would give us her.”

“I am just so tired of trying.”

“I know,” he said.

The door flew open as Melissa and another nurse dressed in bright pink scrubs burst into the room. Melissa carried another blanket with her and a bottle, and the other nurse rolled in one of those plastic cots for infants. It had more blankets and some cloths to clean the baby with.

“This is Verona,” Melissa said. The other nurse nodded happily. She was younger than I was and seemed inherently happier to be here.

“She’ll take very good care of the baby, and she’ll also take you up to the pediatric floor where we can check up on her and make sure she’s in good health.”

Ti and I both nodded, and Melissa’s hand perched on my shoulder.

“It will be all right,” she said reassuringly. “I’m going to go check with Rob and make sure we get everything in the report. He’ll probably catch up with you when he’s made sure the mother doesn’t show up here.”

She smiled again, and then she left the room.

“May I see her?” Verona asked. Ti gave the baby over to her, and Verona turned her over in her arms.

“She seems healthy enough,” she smiled, “beautiful, beautiful little girl. Oh, look at you, so pretty!”

My lips were pressed together, watching another lady hold my baby. She put the bottle to the baby’s lips and watched as she started to drink.

“Good response,” she nodded. “Would you like to feed her?”

* * *

I decided to call her Brea, a name Ti found meant ‘strong’ in a baby name book they had in our room. They had taken her from us again to clean her in a healthy and medical way and to run all the necessary tests while Ti got us both coffee.

He was now sitting in the yellow room in a rocking chair, Brea asleep in his arms. I was sitting on the edge of the bed again, watching how careful he was with her.

“I definitely think we should try the adoption thing again,” he whispered, not wanting to wake her.

“Okay,” I said, this time with a smile. We could make it work.

“Hey,” Rob said softly, peeking his head through the door. He looked exhausted, his eyes were drooping, and he had something more than a five o’clock shadow. He was only 35, but the day had taken its toll on him.

“A girl came in about half an hour ago with abdominal pains,” he said softly. “She’s fifteen and matches the possible description. She lives on the other side of the resort from you, too. Melissa is with her now - they’re checking things over.”

“So you think it’s her?” Ti asked.

Rob nodded, “We’re pretty sure.”

“What will happen to the mother?”

“This a case of child abandonment,” Rob said. “She’ll go to a correctional facility.”

“We don’t want that,” I said, standing up in defense.

“Of course not,” Rob shook his head. “I don’t want that for her either. But the state’s involved now. There’s a CPS agent downstairs, waiting for confirmation from the doctors. She’ll be up here soon, too, to check on the baby. She’s already seen the charts and report.”

Now it was Ti’s turn to sigh, and he did so very loudly.

“What happens to the baby?”

“Well,” he answered, “if the girl’s mom is up for it, she can keep it. If not, it becomes a part of the system.”

“God,” Ti said, running a hand through his hair. “Can we put our names at the top of the list for her then?”

“Sure,” Rob said. “I’m sure CPS will be able to go over all of this with you. Anyway, I just thought I would let you know what’s going on.”

“Thanks,” I said as he left. I fell at Ti’s feet, burying my head in his lap.

“What are we going to do?” It was muffled, but I didn’t care.

“Give her back,” he said softly, fingers tangling in my hair. “I want you to know, whether we get to keep her or not, that I love you very much.”

“I love you,” I said, looking up at him.

Brea cooed again, her eyes rolling in my direction. I stayed there, on the incredibly germey floor of the hospital with my husband and the baby.

* * *

They took her back. The young girl’s mother decided it was her duty to keep Brea, now named Megan. Ana, the baby’s mother, was taken

to jail shortly after her mother agreed to keep our Brea. Rob said Ana would probably be sent to a juvenile center and then a women's facility from there, at least until she was 21. Megan would be older than six by the time she could know her birthmother. Ana told Rob she had heard that churches were part of

“I looked at my own hands – cracked and dry from washing them so much. She had been there in my hands for a day, and now she was gone.”

the SafePlace program and she figured her baby would be taken care of there. She didn't know the chapel was

no longer used regularly.

Ti and I didn't say anything on the way home; he just hummed with the radio, and I stared out the window.

When I got out of the shower, I found a pan of fresh macaroni and cheese begging to be eaten. Food had slipped my mind all day, but Ti knew my favorite. One of the showers downstairs was running, and I took my bowl to the rocking chair on our patio that overlooked the stream and the deer that lived at our resort. A fawn followed its mother, the buck watching from across the stream.

I watched them move cautiously about the grass, the yells of night golfers spreading through the other houses. The deer continued to mingle around the stream, their fur shining in the moonlight. I looked at my own hands – cracked and dry from washing them so much. She had been there in my hands for a day, and now she was gone.

“Come,” Ti said, stepping through the sliding door in just his pajama pants, “The dogs are asleep in the living room. It's time to go to bed, love.”

“You're such a turd,” I said, taking his hand.

“Yes, but I am your turd,” he smirked, wrapping his arms around me.

The fawn, the doe and the buck leapt off into the night.

Dancing in Time

Marilyn Cram-Donahue

“Bob didn’t have Joe’s rhythm or Roy’s style, but he had other assets. He owned a car.”

When I was young, I danced in the living room with the carpet rolled back against the wall and my mother’s fringed light fixture pulled up by its chain so we wouldn’t bump our heads on it.

I danced with Joe, who had rhythm. He had been my friend

since second grade, and we had an understanding. He got to wind up the Victrola, and I got to choose the record. We danced while Frankie sang “Embraceable You,” Vaughn Monroe crooned “Racing with the Moon,” and Frankie Laine belted out “Tumbling Tumbleweeds.” Then Joe moved away. I needed a new partner.

Roy had style. He was made for Swing. We dipped and swayed to “Stella by Starlight” and “Now Is the Hour When We Must Say Goodbye.” I said goodbye to Roy with the dark curly hair and welcomed Ken, a redhead with freckles.

Ken liked to waltz. But it was hard to waltz to “Chattanooga Choo Choo” or “Little Brown Jug.” I kept Ken on the string because he went to UCLA, and the proms there were spectacular. I finally grew tired of waltzing and of Ken and opened the door for Jimmie.

Jimmy didn’t know the first thing about dancing, so I taught him step by agonizing step. Jimmy had neither rhythm nor style. He wasn’t a college man, and he had two left feet. He was afraid to put his arm around my waist and kept letting it drop to my hip, which my mother didn’t like. As soon as possible, I introduced him to my cousin, Louise, who couldn’t dance either, and I rolled back the rug for the boy next door.

He was new to the neighborhood, and we met by the back fence when I was hanging a blouse to dry on the clothesline.

“Hello,” he said.

“Can you dance?” I asked.

Bob didn't have Joe's rhythm or Roy's style, but he had other assets. He owned a car. He blew faultless smoke rings. He was tall. He was a life guard. He was a college man. And he was the best slow dancer I have ever known.

We hummed along as we swayed to "Autumn Leaves. We knew what it meant to have "All This and Heaven Too." There were many "Full moons," . . . but never "Empty Arms." And when he put his arms around me, the night air filled with "Stardust." When Perry Como asked, "Why Not Take All of Me?" we looked at each other and thought that was a pretty good idea.

We raised a family, survived a war, wrote eight books together, and traveled the world. We held hands at the Coliseum, kissed in the shadow of the pyramids, strolled along London streets and listened for the "Nightingale in Berkeley Square." We danced in a hotel in Shanghai, on the island of Crete, on the deck of a ship in the South China Sea, and on a balcony in Sicily while Mt. Etna steamed.

Today, I dance alone. Oh, occasionally I dance with my three sons, and even with a grandson or two, but it isn't the same. So I dance in the kitchen. I dance in the living room. I dance in the bedroom. I dance on the terrace in the moonlight. It is there, when a soft breeze whispers in the trees and the sleeping scent of roses fills the night air that I think I hear a melody and I hold out my arms and sway in a slow dance as "You Keep Coming Back like a Song."

**“And when he put
his arms around me,
the night air filled with
‘Stardust.’”**

Pines

Cassandra Dunn

The air around us was still, the very earth holding its breath. A buzz of an insect, then silence. The creak of a massive pine swaying in a breeze, the sound falling on us from forty feet up, then nothing. Mike's nervous hand brushed mine, nails dirty from helping his father, skin tan from hours spent working outdoors, and ended up back on his lap.

"We could take a walk," he said, his deep voice, new this summer, too loud for the hush surrounding us. I shrugged, stood, brushed off my shorts.

We'd cleared the meadow and found the silty dirt road before he took my hand, his callouses scratching my palm.

The bite of pine was sharp in the air, muted by the dust we kicked up. The sun reflected off the granite slopes around us, pyrite glittering like fairy dust.

Mike kissed me, my first, under the back deck of his parent's cabin, while the other kids poked the bonfire with sticks, drank smuggled beer, sang popular songs, and made big plans for futures that never materialized. Mike had no such plans. He was a rancher's son, his destiny already laid out before him. I had visions of nursing school, art degrees, maybe journalism. College was my destiny, that much I knew.

Our relationship was neatly contained within the Sierra camp where both of our families had cabins. At 6000 feet, at the end of the long dirt road that nobody maintained, the cabins were only accessible during the snow-free days of summer, just a brief window to reconnect with old friends and make new ones. Kids from far-off cities and nearby small towns gathered around nightly games of kick the can and Jeep rides through the forest, before returning to our friends and lives at home. By fall we'd all lost touch again. My romance with Mike lasted just two weeks. Then he returned to his work on the ranch, and I headed off to cheerleading camp.

By the next summer, we were strangers. Mike had grown into a lanky, serious man-in-training. I'd quit cheerleading to focus on Amnesty International, volunteering at the local animal shelter, organizing

community food drives. We sat across the bonfire from each other, our eyes never meeting, and listened to the other kids brag about driver's licenses, sexual encounters, forays into drug use. Mike drank too much and got into an argument with his best friend over their upcoming football season. I left early, disappeared into the darkness, unnoticed, found my way back to my family's cabin by feel and memory, blind along the moonless path.

The following summer I brought up my friend Kristi, a flirtatious blonde, one of the popular girls from school who I'd wanted to impress, but who complained of boredom, dirt, bugs, hot days, and cold nights the entire week in the mountains. While I laid out on the hot granite slab that cupped the swimming hole, she hugged her knees, swatting at every insect in a three-foot radius.

"They're everywhere!" she squealed.

"They won't hurt you."

"Why aren't they bothering you?"

"Because I don't smell like coconut. I told you not to use that stuff."

Kristi laid out next to me, sighed. "This rock is hard."

Her steady stream of whining was interrupted by the sound of male voices, a cannonball splash, obnoxious cheering. I shaded my eyes to see, but refused to sit up. Mike and two other boys from camp were wrestling in the sandy shallows, shirtless, their jean cut-offs sliding off slim hips, revealing boxer shorts beneath.

"Who are they?" Kristi asked.

"Local boys."

She sat up, fluffed her hair, showed off her long legs. Within moments they were on us, bumming snacks, inviting their wet bodies to share our towels. Mike's two friends competed for Kristi's attention, so he and I ended up together on my towel, the castoffs.

"How've you been?" he asked. His hands were huge, his limbs long, his shoulders wide but thin, his chest concave. He was gangly and awkward with his new height, over six feet, but he was still beautiful: cool blue eyes, a few freckles on his tanned face, a wide row of straight teeth.

"Good. You?"

He shrugged, gestured toward his buddies fawning over Kristi, rolled his eyes, and we both laughed.

“You still cheering?”

I shook my head, nodded toward Kristi. “She’s the captain, though.”

He took her in, his eyes lingering on her skimpy bikini top, her legs, before turning back to me. “Yeah, sounds about right.”

“And you? Still breaking your back for your father?”

“And you? Still breaking your back for your father?” It came out harsher than I’d meant, judgmental. I thought he could be so much more if only he’d wanted it, but he didn’t deserve criticism from me. He studied his hands, picked at a callous.

“We brought some of our horses up. If you want to ride.”

“I’m terrified of horses!” Kristi chimed in.

“I’d love to,” I said.

We met just after dinner, in the cooling dusk. Mike’s friends kept Kristi company while he helped me up, adjusted my stirrups.

“You remember how to do this?” he asked.

“Nope,” I said, kicking hard, my horse bolting down the road. I leaned into her, pressing down with my heels, angling my body into the wind. I’d made it halfway out of camp before he caught up, laughing, his perfect teeth shining in the fading light.

We rode a short time, darkness falling fast, the air around us cooling. When we came back to the miniature corral, Kristi and the boys were gone.

“Should we go rescue her?” Mike asked, leaning against the fence.

“She can handle herself.”

He pulled himself up to sitting on the top rail of the pen.

“Should we go rescue Jack and Paul?” he asked.

“She’ll devastate them both, no doubt.”

One of the horses came to me, nuzzling into my pocket, nibbling on the edge of my coat. I rubbed her nose, inhaled the warm animal scent of her. It was our last night in camp, the best night so far. I tried to memorize the moment: the comfort of Mike’s presence, the gust of wind teasing the trees, the sound of the horses ripping mouthfuls of grass from

the meadow.

Kristi's squeal broke the stillness, followed by the pounding of feet. With Paul and Jack in pursuit, she ran to the corral, leaned across the fence, grabbed my arm, yanked hard. I ducked out. She was spooking the horses.

"These country boys are damn crazy!" she said, laughing, tossing her hair, reeking of whiskey. She pulled me down the road, toward our cabin. I let her take me, Mike watching from his perch. Just before we passed out of sight, he raised his broad hand.

"I stared at the beautiful child, who shared Mike's blue eyes, his sandy hair, and felt a loss akin to death."

I didn't see Mike the following summer. I heard he'd been up just before us, that he'd be back at the end of summer. We returned for Labor Day, my new extended family of step-siblings and a new step-father. I took long walks alone, to get away from the

crowded cabin, ended up near Mike's cabin on each stroll. It was empty each time.

The summer after my freshman year in college I caught a glimpse of Mike as I drove into camp, riding tall on one of his horses. He was all man by then, muscular and confident, sitting tall and proud, his head back, watching the pines pass overhead. My shy new boyfriend sat in the passenger seat, taking in the scenery with quiet appreciation. I couldn't think of a plausible reason to visit Mike's cabin together, so the week passed without a reunion. On our final night, Mike's mother Elaine stopped by to say hello, a baby girl perched on her hip.

"Isn't she perfect?" she cooed. "Mike's girl. Arianna."

I stared at the beautiful child, who shared Mike's blue eyes, his sandy hair, and felt a loss akin to death.

"He's working at the ranch then?" my mother asked.

"Oh, no, he's in the Army. He enlisted just after high school. His wife lives with us. She's three months pregnant, with their second."

My petty, selfish grief was stifling. I couldn't sit still. I started dinner while Mom visited, recapped the mundane trivialities of our city life and marveled at the endless hard work of Elaine's ranch. I'd just finished the salad

when Mike stepped in.

“There you are, Mom. It’s late. She needs to go down.” He eased the sleepy child from his mother’s arms, laid her across one of his broad shoulders. The girl nuzzled into her father’s neck, her chubby fingertips trailing along his trim hairline. He nodded toward me, and I nodded back. I couldn’t breathe as I watched him turn and leave, his mother rushing her goodbyes to scurry after him.

I stared into the darkening skies outside, at the place Mike had been just moments before, until my mother eased the salad tongs from my hands.

“Married with a baby at nineteen, and another on the way,” she said, shaking her head. “They sure grow up fast in these parts.”

I sat beside my boyfriend, the straight-A physics major. He was already looking at grad schools, planning a life of teaching and research. The challenge of academia called to us both.

“Can you imagine?” Mom asked, setting the salad before us.

“No way,” I said, but for a brief moment, I could.

It was silly to feel any sense of loss. Mike was not the love of my life. At best, he was the touchstone of puppy love in my pocket. The boy who had no reason to love me but had anyway.

The next summer Mike’s wife and kids were in camp, but Mike was in Afghanistan. I saw his family at the swimming hole together. Elaine, and his young pretty wife, and a chubby, babbling baby boy to go with his tow-headed daughter. At two, she was already leggy like Mike. She played not in the water, but in the dirt alongside it, toughening up her rancher hands. I didn’t stop to say hi. I strode up the trail to the next swimming spot alone. The straight-A boyfriend and I had gone our separate ways.

I never would have been a good rancher’s wife, or military wife living on the family ranch. Those

“Sometimes, when even the constant drone of city life can’t drown out my thoughts, I wonder if I’m partly responsible for Mike’s death.”

long hard days in the sun, the rattling exhaust of greasy machinery, the lowing cattle kicking up dust in the rocky foothills. Not even the memory of the gentle bay mare that I'd ridden that night under the pines could make it right. All that wide open space would have done me in. I was a city girl by design. The anonymity of a crowded street. The bustle of a university campus. That was my home.

By the following summer, Mike was gone. Twenty-two years old, killed in a war I didn't understand. His mother sent my mother a note, and that was the last we heard from them.

Sometimes, when even the constant drone of city life can't drown out my thoughts, I wonder if I'm partly responsible for Mike's death. Maybe if I'd been proud of his legacy, of him being a rancher's son, he wouldn't have felt the need to enlist, to find a different life for himself. Maybe if I'd told him how much I loved those strong hands and tanned shoulders, the build of a man who worked land for a living. Maybe then we'd still see each other on the dusty roads in camp, would laugh about our summer together so long ago, how young we were, how naïve. Maybe his wife and I would have been friends, our kids summer playmates.

I think of Mike's two fatherless children, his young widow, and am grateful that was not my fate. I have my master's degree and my freedom. Love will come. Children are on the agenda. Someday. Until then I have my cute apartment in the heart of downtown, every shop I could want in walking distance. And each May, when the stubborn Sierra snows finally melt, I have my family retreat beneath the pines.

The year that Mike died, his family sold their cabin, took all of my memories of him with them when they left. All but one. On summer days when the scent of the pines is strongest, I'll walk over to his cabin, and if the new owners aren't there, I'll touch the post under the deck, where I was leaning that first time he kissed me. The coarse wood holds the day's warmth, and reminds me of Mike's hands.

Tampons and the Fair

Carlos De La Torre

It started with a toothbrush. Perhaps if Sans had been able to realize what was taking place he wouldn't have strayed or lingered. But he was far too naïve, inexperienced, and caught up in desire to recognize the ploys of a woman. Every night, after they'd play or fight beneath the sheets of the bed, she would go into the bathroom and brush her teeth with his toothbrush. The first night it had only irritated him a little, but after many nights watching her brush, her back to the door, he'd had enough. Desiree, for her part, kept her back to him to conceal her mischievous smile. So one evening, a toothbrush was there for her, a sentinel of fresh, rough bristles contrasting the smooth, pink finish of its grip, leaning lightly against Sans' own blue brush. It had been a funny scene at the supermarket. He'd spent fifteen minutes trying to decide if it was inappropriate to get a girl a blue toothbrush, though later he learned it was her favorite color.

Pieces of her started showing up when she wasn't even around, in places that Sans hardly noticed at first, like her hair ties crammed into the back of the sink's drawers. Oddly named things that Sans knew nothing about lined the medicine cabinet. Things like mascara, foundation, and lipstick were hiding between the Old Spice and aspirin.

It was a small, ornate cabinet Sans bought at a yard sale that brought victory over the bathroom. This came rather ignorantly for Sans because he didn't know the game that was being played. When he saw the cabinet, he saw that it not only matched the tile quite well, but it also would help him keep his bathroom organized, which, for some reason, he now found quite cluttered and cramped.

At first, Desiree would coincidentally show up early on her morning jog. They would talk rather abstractly about what man searches for in a partner between coffee and scones, then Desiree would tease Sans, excite him with her lips, and sneak in questions and statements like "What do you think makes a good girlfriend?" or "I bet it gets lonely in the house." All the while Sans rather successfully took down her sweat pants and grabbed at her thighs through the thin, brightly colored nylon

shorts. Just then Desiree would always remember that she had to continue with her jog, kiss Sans on the cheek and jet off, leaving him anticipating her return. After a week of this he had to make a space for her in the closet. Her pants, some shirts, toe socks, and some panties had even made it into his laundry cycle. Though she did not care much for this, as Sans mixed colors and didn't use fabric softener.

With her shoes came questions – flops, moccasins, and stilettos rather messily strewn about the room – with attachments not to her feet, but to the dangling participles that originated on her lips and dripped off of Sans' back. The sweat pants came with philosophical dissertations.

It was in this way that Desiree, like Scheherazade, had teased in night and day into Sans' life.

Finally, one day when Sans had stepped out of the bathroom, his black hair cupping the bottom of his shoulder blades, dripping wet, and his body still steaming from the shower, he went for his deodorant. He cleared the misty residue from the glass in the restroom and played with the slight belly fat that hung over the edges of the soft, plush towel. Then, reaching for the lower cabinets for the new deodorant, Sans stared into the musky, dim chasm. Surrounded by fake mahogany edges, there was toilet paper, an opened container of q-tips, half a pack of new deodorants, and a new medium cardboard box nestled in the back. It had a light blue tint, colored in with green, with pearls printed onto the front. It even had a small cellophane circle to peer through. The box looked back at him rather unapologetically with its white print announcing Tampax Pearl, and in the bottom right corner the solitary number of 36. It was then that he realized not only that they had been dating seriously for three months, but that she had moved in, and he had allowed it. He chuckled nervously at the whole thing and went to the freezer for a swig of scotch, with the brown towel cradling his hips, his hair still damp. Sans looked out the window for a long while, wondering.

He couldn't remember when was the last time he stopped to think about things in general, much less about circumstances that had led him to his current relationship. However it was that Sans and Desiree got to this point, it had been a blast. Whatever this was, it felt good – so good that it managed to creep into the other aspects of his life. So good, time was passing quickly, or irrelevantly, now. Thinking about it, trying to pinpoint it (whatever "it" was) must

have happened between the warm dinners waiting for him after work and the frequent, tantric sex sessions.

He thought about Desiree, at first, her physical self, with her long smooth, caramel legs, her torso, her toned abdomen cupped by small, perky breasts glistening with sweat. He thought about her clothed, sometimes wrapped in red silk cloth, straps loosely gripping her smooth and slightly bruised shoulders, flowing and puttering all around to just above her knees. Sometimes she was covered by the thick, fluorescent fabric of 80's style leggings, hungrily clinging to her hips, thighs, and ass, with a grey tee draped over her torso and her hair pulled back out of the way, her eyes turning quickly as she "spotted."

Desiree's grace was the next thing Sans thought of, then her humor, her intellect, her attitude (which was excessive for most people), which finally united all the thoughts of her into a life drawing in his head. For the first time since they began this whole mess, he wanted her instantly, but as she was at the dance conservatory. He searched around the kitchen for his cell phone. When he found it, he looked at it blankly for a long time, unsure of how to express himself. He didn't want to come off as needy.

"Hey sweetheart. Fair's in town, we're going. I'll pick you up at 6 :)"
Send.

"Kk sounds good, babe. Got 2 shower tho. Make it 7 <3"

This fair was the biggest of the year, just outside of town, and even people from the neighboring towns thirty minutes away came to visit. It always chose this town, and the inhabitants proudly gloated that it was due to their prominence in the area, though it was actually due to the town's centrally located area, low tariffs, and sleazy local politicians. All the same, everyone enjoyed it. Desiree thought the whole situation was kind of cheesy, like it was right out of a Norman Rockwell picture with little boys running around, jumping from one stack of hay to the other with large, red-striped boxes of popcorn spilling everywhere. Other couples were strolling, cuddling on the hay ride with cotton candy wafting through the air. A Ferris wheel was right in the center, standing 73 feet tall with light bulbs flashing all around its red and yellow frame. They painted it that way because of a belief that the colors enticed

hunger. To make more money, the owners surrounded it with food vendors. Desiree appeared to be having a good time in spite of how wonderfully cheesy everything was.

“Are you ready to go in?”

“Oh, I don’t know. It’s umm ... really scary looking.”

She said this with an inflection wrought with sarcasm. Sans just ignored it. He’d enjoyed coming here since he could remember. This place had always been so magical and stimulating that he knew Desiree would come to like it, especially when the moment came that he knew she’d be impressed.

Desiree seemed like she was having fun. She feigned being afraid through the ratty, old, haunted house, where locals with cheap plastic masks jumped out of the obvious hiding places, and was facetiously amused at the tilt-a-whirl, the wooden rollercoaster, and the flying swings. She even acted like she enjoyed playing jockey on the carousel. Desiree had her arm crossed around Sans’ arm, clutching him with her head resting on his shoulder as they walked. They came across one of those rigged fair games that no one ever won at, when she stopped him to observe it.

“That game’s stupid. It’s rigged. The size of the rings is just about the same size as the top of the bottle. Only idiots would risk anything on that. Be a lot cheaper to just buy the damn giant panda. Know what I mean, babe?”

“Oh, I dunno. If you want the panda, I think I could win it for you.”

“Come on, babe, that’s not what I’m saying.”

“What! You don’t think I could win that panda for you? Just look at my musk-ulls.” Sans flexed in a dramatic and somewhat sincere way. Desiree did find it amusing, but she seemed worried that he would be upset when he didn’t win it for her.

“Oh my, what big muscles. You must be working out. All the same, sweetheart, I just wanna ride the Ferris wheel.”

“That’s too bad, toots. I’m getting you the panda. Choose your color.”

“Fine, but I’ll only take the really big pink one. And now I’m set on it, so we aren’t leaving until you win it ... or buy it for me. That’s what you get for calling me toots.”

What Desiree didn’t know was that Sans had actually become an expert at this early on. When he was sixteen he came to the fair every day until he could beat almost all the ploys of the mostly crooked games. At first he faked

out Desiree, acting sloppily, but then he landed one, making it seem accidental. With every shot Desiree became more taken in with the game, eager to see if Sans could make the five shots. When he made the fifth ring, he did so with poise and certainty, pointing at the lineup of giant, multi-colored, plush pandas on the wall.

“I’ll be having the pink one, please.” By this time Desiree was glowing, just like Sans knew she would be. They boarded the Ferris wheel last, just before heading home. The panda was squished in between them and she had her arms around it, like a child carrying around a blanket. He reached inside his coat and pulled out his flask, taking a large swig and handing it over to her. She took a large swig herself and screwed up her face.

“Uh, you gotta tell me when it’s Jeiger.”

“I thought you liked it.”

“I did until we started drinking so much scotch.”

“I always drink scotch.”

“Whatever, smartass. So ... I actually had a lot of fun.”

“Good, I wanna ... wait... Actually?”

“Well, you know, the fair. It’s kinda cheesy. It’s kinda like you bought me cotton candy and you won me a huge stuffed animal. What’s next? Are you going to give me a promise ring and ask me to go steady at the top of the Ferris wheel?”

“Ha ha. Ummm ... well, since you mentioned it ... I don’t know if it matters to you or not, but here’s a key to the house.”

“Shut the fuck up, finally. So can I call you my boyfriend now, asshole?”

“I guess you probably already have been.”

“Only to my friends.”

You wake up in your office to Deborah dropping the box of rotting Chinese food from your desk and into the trashcan. Your face is sore from lying next to your keyboard, and you rub your eyes before looking up at her. She's wearing a scarf with orange monkey silhouettes imprinted on it.

"What?" you say.

Deborah swears she's thirty-three, but you bet a driver's license would say otherwise. Easily in her fifties. Her face is scrunched up, and if what she says about her age is true, it would have to be from years of drug addiction before she cleaned herself up and snuck her way into the corporate world.

She looks you over, and frowns.

"Jim wants the reports on last week's hotdog production."

"I sent it to him last night."

"Well, he didn't get it." She looks you over. "You look like shit."

You want to say, *Likewise*, but you refrain. Deborah has somehow earned a respected position in the company, so to return the offense would mean a write-up, or worse. She leaves the room and slams the office door. At least the florescent orange monkey silhouettes are gone.

There's a puddle of drool next to your keyboard. You pull some napkins out from the top desk drawer and wipe it, then toss the napkins into the trashcan.

You stand, stretch, and open the blinds of your office to reveal the inside of the building. The place is busy. Barney, the intern, is walking from desk to desk, licking everyone's ass, asking them what type of coffee they would like, and how many packs of sugar.

It wasn't that long ago that you were in his shoes. Now you're counting hotdogs for a living. You look around to make sure no one is looking, then spit a glob of mucus into the trash. You watch it ooze into the Chinese food. It looks like the saliva is giving the food some of its moisture back.

From the desk drawer, you pull out a toothbrush, toothpaste, an electric razor, and a comb, and head down the hall toward the bathroom. Your boss, Jim Brawnsley, a skinny, bespectacled kid who just graduated with a degree in business, stops you in the hall.

“Man, you look terrible.”

“About to clean up.”

“Good. Listen, can I get you to stay in late again tonight? I have a deadline I can’t make. I made some plans, and unless I can get someone to cover, the whole company is going to suffer.”

You agree. Not because you want to look good, but because at this point, you don’t see a reason to go home.

Jim is probably planning to drink heavily tonight at a sports bar. You feel like it should make you mad, but it doesn’t. You’re happy for the overtime, and the seclusion of a dark office building.

The bathroom smells like the lemony cleaner that the janitors use. You shave in front of the mirror. The right side of your face is bruised from sleeping on the desk, and once you finish shaving, you open the razor’s head and tap it on the edge of the sink until the hair is piled up inside the porcelain bowl. You turn the water on, and watch it swirl down the drain.

Paul, an accountant whom you rarely speak with, enters the bathroom, and unzips in front of the urinal farthest from the door. His piss comes out in bursts, with a few *ahhs* and *oohs*. Paul’s a huge guy, and since you can’t imagine anyone sleeping with him, you imagine his pain is from some STD he contracted in his backseat with a hooker. Well, or maybe Deborah.

He finishes, finally, zips up, and joins you at the sinks.

“Good morning,” he says.

You nod to acknowledge it, add some toothpaste to your toothbrush, and start brushing to avoid small talk.

He doesn’t truly wash his hands; he just soaks them, and flings the water to the ground before drying them with the electric blowers. When his hands are nearly dry, he wipes them on his pants to finish the job, then walks to the sink next to you to check his appearance. He waits until you rinse your mouth out to speak.

“Have you seen the new marketer they hired?”

“No.”

“A fuckin’ fox, man.”

“That’s nice.”

“You’re not excited? Everyone’s excited. Even Deborah is having lesbian fantasies.”

The very thought of Deborah having any type of fantasy is nauseating. You can almost smell it. “I haven’t seen her. How would I be excited?”

“Let’s not get all logical about it, man.”

“Yea, logic is for accountants.”

You run water over your comb, run it through your hair. Paul blows his nose in a paper towel, says he’ll “see you around,” then leaves.

After your hair looks somewhat presentable, you grab your things and return to your office. There’s an envelope sitting on your keyboard with your name on it. You return everything to the drawer, and lean back in the chair. Your phone rings. It’s Jim.

“I’m checking my e-mail. I’m not seeing the report.”

You ask him to check the spam folder.

“Oh shit, there it is. Thanks.”

He hangs up and you sigh.

You take the envelope off the keyboard, and slit the top with a letter opener. It’s a formal complaint about your lack of participation in the team-building activities. You throw it in the trash, move the mouse to wake the computer, and begin working.

You plug in the numbers you received from the assembly foreman, calculate the percent of company growth, or loss in this case, and make it look pretty on some graphs.

After a few hours, it’s time for lunch. Your stomach is aching from not eating breakfast, so you make your way to the break room. There’s a round table in the center with a few chairs. Paul has occupied one of them, and has a plate in front of him with two peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. The third one is in his hands. He’s mid-bite when he acknowledges your entrance, and speaks with his mouth full.

“Did you see her yet?” he says with a mouthful of peanut butter.

“No. I’ve been working.”

“Well, it’s too late anyway. Your man here already has that shit on lock.”

You want to laugh, but you can’t force yourself to do it. There’s something truly sad about the reality of it that makes you feel sorry for the guy. His peanut butter covered fingers, those plump cheeks filled with globs of

sandwich. You blame your lack of response on a lack of sleep.

You open the fridge and find a bag with Barney, the intern's, name on it. The paper crinkles up as you snatch it out of the fridge. You ignore Paul's wave goodbye, and take the food back to your office.

Halfway through the cold macaroni salad you feel guilty and lose your appetite. Barney means well most of the time. You recap the tupperware and return the bag to the fridge. Paul is gone now, and most of the office is empty, minus a few of the sales associates who look like they are playing catch-up on some of their work.

You return to your office, begin working, and finish the entire week's worth of work within a few hours. The only thing left to do is Jim's work. You figure you can save it until the rest of the office is empty.

There's a faint smell of body odor coming from you, and you decide it's a good idea to head home, take a shower, check the mail, and make sure all the bills are caught up. Jim stops you on your way out. You're halfway through putting your jacket on.

"Whoa whoa whoa. Where you going?"

"I finished my work. I'm heading home for a shower. I'll be back tonight."

Deborah comes out from the bathroom and joins the conversation.

"Well, look at this odd pair."

"We'd make a cute couple, don't you think?" says Jim.

"Honey, you'd make a cute couple with anyone."

You try to bypass Jim and avoid the conversation, but he cuts you off. "Hold up. Can you join me in my office?"

You glance at Deborah, who is smiling. All those florescent monkeys look like they are smiling, too.

Jim's office has a fake tree in the corner, but the walls are blank white. He keeps his desk in the middle, which, apart from his computer, is empty. He asks you to sit. You feel like saying no and just running home, but you sit anyway.

"You doing ok?"

"Yes."

"Is there something off?"

You half expect him to pull a clipboard out from his desk and take

notes.

“I’m just tired. I need a shower.” You shift in your seat. The leather chair is making your ass sweat.

“Good. I need you to be on the top of your game.”

“I am.”

“It’s just some people are worried.”

“About what?”

“There’s just been some talk about how secluded you’ve been lately,” he says. “We don’t want any incidents.”

“Incidents? You’re joking, right?” you say.

He holds his hands up. “Hey, I’m just the messenger. Don’t kill the messenger.”

“Can I go now?”

“Yea, yea. Fine. I just have to be professional, you know?”

You bite the inside of your cheeks, and nod.

While you’re headed out the door, he adds, “Clean yourself up.”

You leave the office with your muscles tense, and walk with high pace to the parking lot, which is covered in snow and ice. Your car has a thick layer of snow on the top and windshield. You pull out your wallet, use a credit card to push the snow off, grind the ice away, then open the car and get inside.

You’re fumbling with getting the keys out of your coat pocket when someone knocks on your window. It’s Barney, the intern. He waves. You wave back. He says something through the window, but you can’t quite make it out, so you put the keys into the ignition, start the car, and roll the window down.

“Hope you feel better,” he says.

“I’m not sick.”

He looks confused, and like he is holding back his shivering. You turn the heater on and roll up the window. Barney stands there for a moment and watches you. Someone calls for him from the sidewalk, and he turns and walks towards them. Once the windows are defrosted enough to see, you head home.

Your apartment complex is in one of the richer neighborhoods, and you remember when you used to be proud of it. The buildings are painted with elegant browns and tans, soft colors that are meant to sooth and comfort.

The apartment is on the third floor, so you enter the building, hit the button on the elevator, and wait. The lights above the steel doors descend

from the number six. When the door opens, a man walking a German shepherd exits. The dog stops and sniffs at your shoe, and the owner tugs on the leash to pull it away. The chain tightens around its fur, but it keeps trying to sniff you.

“Sorry,” says the owner.

“It’s fine.”

You remember when you had that much will. But like the dog, the chain pulled tighter, and you were pulled out the door.

The elevator buttons are the color of pearl. You hit the one labeled with a “3,” the doors close, and you let out a sigh. You pull at your shirt collar, loosen the tie, and unbutton the top button. You breathe in like it’s your first breath, deep and heavy to fill all the bronchioles in your lungs. You hold it in until the elevator door opens.

The air in your apartment is stale and cold. You turn the living room lights on and walk to the thermostat to start the heater. In the center of the living room is a leather couch that faces a flat screen television mounted on the wall. A cabinet in the corner contains a large collection of dvds that you haven’t had the chance to watch.

You open the fridge in the kitchen and pull out a bottle of water and chug it down. When the bottle is empty, you toss it in the sink and head to the bedroom, where you strip down and shower.

When you’re done, you pull out a clean shirt and a pair of slacks and lay them on the bed. You finish drying, and look them over. They look stifling. You put your arms through the shirt sleeves, and pull it fit to your back, then start with the first button. When you slide it through the slit, you feel the collar pinch the back of your neck. It pulls at the tiny white hairs.

You walk to the bathroom with only the top buttoned, and look in the mirror. It looks more like a leash than a shirt. The way it contours around your skin, leaving little breathing room for your neck. You rub between the collar and the skin of your neck, and pull at it. A little at first, then harder. You pull at it so hard that the button snaps off and bounces off the mirror and drops into the sink. It spins around the porcelain bowl, until it disappears down the drain.

Then it’s the sleeves that bother you. The ironed stiffness of a

dress shirt; it's like a shell, a cage, really. You drop the shirt on the linoleum of the bathroom, but bend down to pick it up, and walk it over to your bed, and splay it out across the comforter.

You remove all of the button-up work shirts from your closet and lay them on the bed, along with the slacks, the long socks, the sport coats, suits, and dress shoes. You observe the pile of clothing.

From your dresser, you pull out some sweat pants and a sweat shirt, and put them on. The cotton feels like a womb.

You open the bedroom window, and stick your head out into the cold. Down below, the sidewalk is busy with pedestrians; the road full of traffic. You pop the screen off and let it fall down below.

One by one, you toss articles of clothing out the window, and watch them float down to the street. They dance in the cold air on their way down like music in a symphony hall. Cars slow as they pass by the spectacle, and people on the street, dressed in their parkas, beanies, and jackets, stop to look. It's like they are cheering you on, telling you to continue, so you start to throw out more than one piece at a time until the entire sidewalk is covered with everything that you used to be. You run out of clothing and stand near the window, watching as people begin to sort through the clothes. When the biting cold starts to hit you, you step away from the window.

You walk to the living room, shaking. There is a wool blanket folded up on the couch. You wrap it around yourself and walk to the cabinet of movies, pull one out, and put it on. You watch movie after movie, until the coffee table is covered with take-out remnants, the dvds, one by one, molding into a heap on the floor, and your voicemail is full.

Leap of Faith

B.R. Bonner

A late summer wind scythed the open fields, bending charred stalks blackened by a runaway fire. Furrowed lines converged in points on the horizon. A pallid atmosphere, streaked with cirrus banded orange from flocculating dust, refracted the onset dusk with prismatic gleams, with colors of a washed out photograph. Thousands of blackbirds swirled in unison, while the distant creaks of oil pumps, dipping and bobbing like giant insects, repeated their metallic songs in mournful amplitudes.

The three friends, Jack, Keith, and Kevin, converged here to swim in the tanks of windmills, to shoot at jackrabbits or No Trespassing signs with their father's revolvers, to drink Falstaff beer and listen to eight-track tapes of The Stones or The Who. They walked the tracks of the Santa Fe line, smoked cigarettes and cigars beneath its creosoted trestles, and lied endlessly of conquests with girls who wouldn't be caught dead with them. They were coming of age in the early seventies, in an era when the waves of discontent had begun to peak, when the images of napalmed Vietnamese children seared the consciousness of the nation.

There was little to do in the small towns of the Texas panhandle, and so they gravitated naturally to thrill-seeking. They raced their Chevys on dark county roads. They brought girls to the drive-in and tried to make out with them in the back seats of their cars, hooting at their new-found heroes, Bruce Lee, Steve McQueen, and Billy Jack. The innocence of their early childhood cemented friendships into lasting bonds. They collectively threw caution to the winds, with youthful indomitability.

Jack was in trouble with the law. He had recently been arrested for crashing his car into the Woolworths while drunk; his hearing was pending. He sat on the hood of his father's Mustang, sipping from a bottle of vermouth, pondering his future. Keith, who sat on the hood of his Chevelle, had been accepted to the University of Texas and was biding his time, determined to have as much fun as possible before shipping off to school. Kevin, the oldest of the three, the quietest and most reflective of the group, had graduated high school the year before and was rough-necking in the oil fields. He'd just returned home from a job in

Oklahoma. The others found him surly and taciturn since he'd come back, and were wondering what was bothering him.

It was Jack who confronted him first. He pulled out a Marlboro and lit it with his Zippo. "So what's eating you, man? You're not your normal old self these days."

"Yeah," Keith joined in. "You'd think your number just came up. What gives?"

Kevin, a tall, stocky, dark-haired youth, looked up at each of them, but seemed to be at a loss for words.

"Give me one of those. I'm all out," he finally said.

Jack tossed him his pack of cigarettes. "Life on the rig got you down, buddy?"

"You were right about my number coming up. Got a draft notice in the mail."

Jack slid off the hood of his car. Muttering in disgust, he threw his bottle into the field.

They grew quiet, each of them lost in the threads of their own thoughts and taking drags from their menthol cigarettes. The blackbirds continued circling overhead as the sun intersected the horizon, casting long shadows at their feet.

"Does Vickie know?" Keith asked.

"Yes. And she made it plain she doesn't want to be the girlfriend of a baby-killer."

"That's a stupid thing to say."

"She didn't use those words exactly, but I'm sure she was thinking it."

"Then you should have no problem forgetting about her," Jack interjected.

Kevin guzzled the last of his beer and reached for another from an ice chest. "I wish I could," he said quietly. "But I know that won't be possible. Not when I'm over there."

"Well," Jack said, cracking a smile. "You can always think about Keith here when you get all homesick and lonesome in the jungle. He'll even give you his picture if you want it."

They laughed. Keith threw his empty can of Copenhagen at Jack and hit him on the shoulder. "With pussies like you, we don't stand a chance in hell of winning this war."

They laughed again, only not as hard as before. They stood in nervous silence, lost again in their own thoughts, wondering what Kevin would be facing in the months ahead.

As the darkness began to enfold around them and the stars lit up the night sky, headlights appeared on the highway in the distance. They watched the lights slow down, then turn onto the dirt road, heading straight towards them, bouncing along the road ruts with the jangling sounds of a pickup truck.

“Let’s get out of here,” Keith said. He moved towards the door of his car.

“Hold up,” Jack cautioned. “This isn’t a private road. We’ve got nothing to worry about. Just sit tight.”

The headlights belonged to a Fifties era Ford pickup. It slowed to a stop on the dirt road before them. The engine was turned off and the headlights switched to bright.

Shielding their eyes from the bright lights, they saw two figures in the truck. Both wore hats. For several moments, the figures in the truck sat still. Perhaps they were talking to each other, but they gave no indications of doing so.

Finally the driver’s side door creaked open, and a tall man got out and strode toward them. His profile revealed a large gut protruding from a western style shirt with shiny snap buttons. He pushed back his cowboy hat and addressed them in a low, authoritative voice.

“What do you boys think you’re doing out here?”

Keith held up his bottle of beer. “Just enjoying our favorite beverage, sir,” he said with false politeness.

The man stared at him and said nothing. He turned his head around slowly to the other man in the truck and motioned for him to get out.

The passenger got out of the truck and stood beside his partner. He was shorter than the driver, and thinner. He wore thick, coke-bottle glasses and had a scraggly beard.

“You thinkin’ they’re the ones?” the man with the glasses asked.

The man with the protruding gut didn’t answer, but repeated the same question he’d asked earlier, as if he’d not heard Keith’s reply. “I

asked you what you boys are doing here.”

The young men looked at one another, puzzled by the repeat of the question.

“He told you already, mister,” Jack responded. “We’re out here drinking beer. Not to be rude or anything, but what concern is that of yours?”

The driver walked over to the nearest car. “Open the trunk,” he commanded.

They balked, and did not move.

“I said, open the trunk,” he repeated, his voice low and full of firmness.

“You’d better do like he says,” the smaller man warned them.

“Look. We’re not on anybody’s property here,” Jack said, his voice propagating a tremulous undercurrent.

“Go get the crowbar out the back of the truck. And bring a flashlight while you’re at it.”

“Wait,” Keith implored. “What gives you the right to break in to our cars?”

“Go on,” the man snapped.

The smaller man headed back to the truck and carried back with him a crowbar and flashlight, which he turned on and shined in the faces of the young men, illuminating the confusion now frozen upon their faces.

“This car isn’t mine,” Jack said. “It’s my Dad’s. He’ll kill me if you scratch it up.”

“Then open it like I told you to,” the man commanded once again, his eyes squinting at Jack.

“All right. Just take it easy.” Jack fumbled for the keys in his pocket. They huddled around the trunk as he opened it and revealed the usual contents of a car trunk: jumper cables, a bottle of anti-freeze, an opened package of rear brake light bulbs, a small toolbox, and fast food wrappers.

“What’s this?” The smaller man shined the flashlight on a paper bag partially covered by a blanket at the back of the trunk. He snatched it up and upended the contents onto the blanket. He then shined the flashlight on an assortment of pyrotechnics: bottle rockets, roman candles, tube launchers, smoke bombs, firecrackers, sparklers, and the more powerful firecracker known as the M80.

“Leftovers from the Fourth of July,” Keith said. “That’s all. We haven’t

been firing any. I promise.”

“It was them all right,” the smaller man said.

“I reckon so,” the driver replied, closing the trunk. He pulled out a pistol from the back of his pants and pointed it at Keith.

“What the hell’s this?”

The man with the protruding gut stood before them, heavy, dour, and pondering his next words. He looked off in the direction of the fields, and said, “Seems you boys were the ones that burnt my fields up. Two hundred acres of cotton destroyed, all of it lost in that fire you set.”

“You’re wrong, mister,” Keith objected. “It wasn’t us.”

“I know it was you,” the man said evenly. “I saw these same cars out here on the Fourth; saw them with my binoculars from the porch of my house over yonder.” He pointed east to a small house on a rise in the distance. “Had trouble getting my truck to start after I’d seen you, and you boys was long gone by the time I got here.” The man gave himself a satisfied smile. “I figured I’d catch up with you one of these days. And now it looks like this is one of them days.”

The young men stood in silence, horrified by the accusations of the farmer.

“The bank decided last week to call in all my loans,” the man continued in his flat, even tone. He looked at them one by one to ensure they understood the gravity of his statement. “I’m sure none of you boys have anywhere near the money I’d need to pay these loans off. And I think it’s safe to say, no hick like me is ever going to win damages from any of your families.” He motioned at them with his gun to move towards the pickup.

“Tie ’em up,” he said to the smaller man with the thick glasses. “We’re going to take us a little ride.”

They walked along the railroad bridge, eighty feet above a muddy red river, the young men with their hands tied loosely behind their backs. The bridge had a walkway along the southern end of it. The river, coursing several feet below its usual height on account of the drought,

sparkled brilliantly in the moonlight below them.

At the center of the bridge the taller man commanded them to stop. His companion carried a shotgun, which he now leveled at the young men who stood huddled together, shivering in the twilight cold.

“I’m a Catholic,” the farmer announced in an oddly personal tone, “which means I’m a strong believer in the redemptive power of confession. You’re probably wondering why I’m telling you this. Well, it’s simple, really. I’m going to offer you boys a chance to confess what you’ve done, right here and now. If you do, I’ll let you go. Simple as that. If you don’t, you’re gonna jump off this bridge, and you’ll just have to deal with whatever happens next in the best way you can.” He looked over the bridge railing. “When I was your age, I jumped off this bridge once. The river was full in them days, but I still broke my arm doing it.”

The smaller man laughed. “You was out of your damn mind.”

“You say that now. But you wanted to jump like the rest of us. You just didn’t have the balls to do it.”

Jack stepped forward. “Ok, I confess. I shot off fireworks and burned up your cotton. Now please let us go.”

The farmer considered what he’d just heard. He took a step towards Jack, his flashlight beam searching Jack’s eyes to verify his sincerity. “Very well. I accept your confession, son. Cut this one loose.”

The smaller man pulled out a hunting knife and cut the rope behind Jack’s back. “Looks like he’s a good Christian after all,” he said snidely.

“You know damn well,” Keith said, his tone quick and cutting, “that none of us is going to deny burning up your crops, even if we didn’t really do it.”

“Yes. I do know that,” said the farmer, giving a quick smile. “And that’s ok by me, because I know, without a doubt, that it was you three that done it. My conscience is clean on that. What’s important to me is that you come to atone. But if you just can’t find it within yourself to atone for what you done to me, then you’re going to have to take the leap of faith.”

“It’s been a while,” the man with the coke-bottle glasses said, “since we had us a leap of faith.”

Keith put his hands out defensively. “All right. I confess. We shot off fireworks on the Fourth of July. They got out of control. We tried to put out the fire, but we couldn’t, and it burned up the fields. I’m sorry that it happened.

And I'm willing to try to help pay for your losses as soon as I find a job."

"Thank you, son. I appreciate your honesty. Cut 'm loose."

The smaller man grudgingly obliged. "Now it's your turn, boy," he said to Kevin.

Kevin stood against the guardrail, his head down, his breathing heavy and quick. He looked up at the men, the cold moon shining on his face. He slowly shook his head.

"Come on, Kevin. For God's sake."

"Hurry up," Keith demanded. "Let's get the hell out of here."

They stared at him, realizing, incredulously, that their friend had made up his mind not to confess.

"Tell them. Admit it so we can go home. Say it!"

"No," Kevin replied erratically. "I won't confess to something I didn't do. And I've made up my mind on something else. I'm not going to Nam. I don't care what their beliefs are, if they're communist or socialists or whatever they hell they call themselves. I can't do it. I can't kill people for no good reason."

"Don't be a fool," Jack said cynically. "We'd all be dead if we thought that way."

"Maybe," Kevin replied softly, his voice carrying with it the earnest appeal of a conscience in turmoil. "But regardless of the justification, no matter how right we think it is, some of us would rather die than take the life of another man."

The farmer grabbed Kevin by the arm. "Stand him up on the rail. Looks like this one's takin' the leap."

I could have been a messiah. I even felt myself becoming one, but I changed from the weight of time. Everyone shrugs. Sure, I believed in some ideology that may be impossible to live up to, but who has not? I can truly say that I felt it. Felt the power of being Gandhi, Sweet Martin, and Albert Schweitzer, but I know not where I stopped. I still try, but somewhere in life I learned to live.

There were those nights I sang so hard and so loud I could taste the blood in my throat. Days where I asked myself: “How many strokes does it take to paint a mountain?” This shift in ideology did not mature out of naivety. Instead, life casts questions that you answer in your own way. I realized that the world is not split in two. There is no black and white. There is no “having your cake and eating” because there is no cake and there is no eating it, and the hues of our souls are all grey. Life teaches all of us, being the great universalizer, with the same lessons but in smaller doses. It is trite. Hardships make life easier, but anytime you make a judgment, it can be genius or foolish. Everything will be all right, but there will be no miracles here.

I went to an orchestra with my grandmother and, during the second movement, a world famous percussionist performed a movement using only paper and the occasional string movement. He tore paper, used it as a whistle, and banged on long sheets of butcher paper hanging from the ceiling. Afterwards, I asked my grandmother what she thought.

“Either that young man is a genius or an idiot.”

But life’s lessons are not made up of clever anecdotes.

His Majesty

Felix P. Sepulveda

I am the king. It is not something I chose. It was God's choice. He made me a man, and I don't apologize for my authority. I rule with compassion and benevolence. The sun is the most powerful in the sky, as I am the most powerful in my household. The lesser members of my universe obey me with demanded respect.

My wife is the moon. She is bright and beautiful. Although my son and daughter gaze at her in awe, she orbits my presence in deference. But as the moon commands the tide, she causes things to obey. I humor her once in a while by doing the dishes when she tells me. As a misty cloud covers the sun's more powerful rays, sometimes my authority is obscured.

My daughter is slim, petite, and beautiful. She is a tiny star. Everything is brighter when she smiles, but I am not starry-eyed when asked to rule on whether she can take my car. I demand to know what time she will be home so that I can grant my permission. Humph ... she should get her own car soon.

There are two constellations in the heavens called the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper. They mirror my son and me. He's six foot one, and I am five foot five. Not funny, God.

No matter. My son knows who the boss is. Every time I hand him a twenty-dollar bill, I make sure to mark down the exact date that he is going to repay me. The pen tied to the calendar on the wall is running out of ink, but I expect no, I demand repayment.

Even though I rule my human subjects with leniency, my decrees are down to earth when it comes to our dog. Bama is named in honor of our president because we got him the day he was elected. I proclaimed that we could have a dog only if he was absolutely housebroken. I remember standing regally with pride in the living room with my finger pointing in the air when I made this iron-clad law. "There will be no messes in this house!" So now, when I am outside picking up his business, I sometimes stop, lean on the shovel and gloat over my power.

It's good to be King.

Julia, the Robber Bride

Patricia Molnar

My Grandma Julia was a small, deep river in my life, always there in the background. She was quiet and pleasant with little sparkles of light, but most of her was unknown. As a kid, I couldn't see what she kept hidden beneath the surface.

What I did see were her actions – the attention Grandma lavished on me, the third grandchild – the one not yet “claimed” by my other grandma. For my birthday, she baked sumptuous, chocolate monstrosities of cakes. She dressed me in yellow puffs of dresses (to match my platinum blond hair), gave me little dolls, and did anything she could for her special girl. From head to toe, I felt like a Hungarian Princess. Still, I saw flashes of sadness in that legacy, reflecting through the still waters of her deep, brown eyes.

Her husband, my Grandpa Joseph, clouded our relationship as he did many others, with stinky pipes, a dour face, and fiery words. I suppose he, too, was young once, but he lives in my memory as a grouchy, grizzled immigrant. His Hungarian-ness was a shield from an unwelcoming American world. He dominated his home like only a man from a patriarchal culture could.

My dad later described a visit he had made to see his mom. She had recently undergone a major operation. My dad sat down to talk with his dad, who was puffing on a pipe, as usual, while Grandma got up at Grandpa's request to get the two men food. My dad protested, “Dad, she's sick. You know she shouldn't be up.”

Grandpa responded blandly, “She likes it like this.”

Now I wonder, “Did she?” She certainly took pride in her tidy yellow house and her cooking (a yellowing article I saw a few years ago proclaimed her “Pomona Valley Housekeeper of the Year 1962”). Perhaps she did “like it like this,” but, for my father, it was a snapshot of the harsh standard Grandma was expected to meet.

“Still, I saw flashes of sadness in that legacy, reflecting through the still waters of her deep, brown eyes.”

I wonder about Grandma Julia's deferred dreams. I like to cherish the wild speculation that she was a poet without a clean, well-lighted place, an artist without a studio, a singer without a Phantom applauding beneath the floorboards. Like Esperanza's grandmother, maybe she sat by her window sometimes, thinking about the excitement she couldn't see around the corner, dreaming of a Magyar Horseman who would come to carry her off to his bejeweled cavern high in the Atlas Mountains to be his robber bride. I'll never know. Like everyone else, I have to substitute my own fanciful dreams, because the waters of time have become too muddy for me to see through.

“...maybe she sat by her window sometimes, thinking about the excitement she couldn't see around the corner.”

Sugar and Salt

Jeff Mays

It was time to take the dough out of the fryer. It had changed from a pale yellow to the just-right light brown, so Jiao scooped up the floating treats and placed them on the drying rack. It's funny how something wet can become crunchy.

The presence of a customer drew her out of the dark fry room and into the airy light of the back of the counter. She took one look at him and recognized him instantly. It had been almost eleven years, but it was undeniable.

She grabbed the tongs.

The room had been lit by a 60-watt bulb hidden inside a small, crème-colored shade. He had smiled at her when she opened the door to come inside.

"Can I he'p you?" she asked while studying the scalloped edge of the stainless steel tongs.

Her ten-year-old daughter was in school now. She was beautifully Amer-Asian. Her round, dark eyes. Her straight, light-brown hair. The mothers at the park couldn't resist telling her that her daughter was just a doll.

"A maple bar, please."

After she had rubbed the oil onto his back, she rubbed her slick hands up the backs of his thighs and touched the nubs at the edge of the white, terry-cloth towel.

"Eighty-fi' cent, p'ease," she told him now. This would be the moment, she knew, but he just passed her a bill, and she handed over two coins and a maple bar in a small, white paper bag.

He smiled and turned towards the glass door, made the bells jingle, and walked out into the rest of his day.

“Get your hand off of my leg, Loonsfoot. I know your heart is someplace else. Probably with the girl from Channel Five News, Marilyn Brosco. You should have told me about her. You shouldn’t have left me thinking everything was great between us when all the time you were thinking of her. That really pisses me off,” you said.

That was all you said the last night we were together. The next morning you were gone. Left me a note with a phone number you could be reached at and left. Never gave me a chance to explain. I probably wouldn’t have anyway. I never have before. I hate explaining myself, it’s too painful. I was hoping you would have understood the unsaid. Knew the words I should have said but never did.

I’m not afraid of anything more than I am of loneliness. The only reason I’m afraid to die: absolute zero. It’s not heaven or hell; it’s that there might not be either.

My cat, Veronica, broke my trance. She jumped up on my lap and broke my train of thought, disrupting my melancholy. I stroked her. She purred, her contentment obvious in her eyes, her gold reptile eyes that had never left the sea.

I love my cat, the silent love between us. It is a perfect love, ethereal, no demands on either of us. A pure and truthful affection, unlike my love of Esther. I gently put her down on the floor. “Time for breakfast.”

I filled a bowl for each of us and put them on a tray. Corn flakes and milk for me, dried fish fat, pork, and beef guts for Veronica. I walked out to the balcony of my apartment with the tray in hand and Veronica close behind. It was a tenth floor apartment. Not so high that you couldn’t see the world below, but high enough to keep it where I want it, at a distance.

As I began spooning the corn flakes from the bowl I turned on the morning television news with the remote, the Channel Five News with Marilyn Brosco. Marilyn bombarded me. American drones in Afghanistan and Pakistan, militant bombs in Kashmir, Palestinian rockets in Israel.

Al Qaida, Taliban, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, and Hamas rockets and suicide bombings, and Yankee nine millimeter bombs in the streets below the balcony, a new Blitzkrieg raining on my world.

A young boy walked the street with a youthful perfection, in his brand new, spring-air, radium-colored, electro-pumped tennis shoes. A body of a young girl was being shown on the television screen. Her arms and legs and life had been blown away. Her brother survived. The mortar had fragged the top of his head off, but his heart was still beating as he lay on his hospital bed connected to life by a swarm of tubes and wires. Veronica crunched her guts. I slurped away at the corn flakes. As I ate, I stared at the fine print on the box: 675% of your recommended daily allowance of maggot protein, it said.

The telephone rang. I walked inside and answered it. By the silence on the other end of the line, I knew it was Esther the Traitor. "You don't have to say a word, Esther. I know it's you, and I understand why you left. I knew you were having an affair a long time ago. That's why I never bothered to tell you about Marilyn. Did my indiscretion matter anyway? My affair with Marilyn was only in my head, ethereal. It was not like I was actually sleeping with her. She was just a daydream, a fixation I had on a seemingly perfect woman, a television woman. Our marriage was working. We were doing all the right things. We played the little flesh game. Is the probing that important anyway? Do we really understand this nagging desire we have? This race between our glands to exchange eggs, all this hugging, kissing, probing, banging, and penetrating in a desperate scramble to escape death, attempting to propagate an end-less-ness to our existence."

"Mr. Loonsfoot, this is Martha Kossman of the Third World of America Credit Corporation. How are you today, sir? If you will allow me a few moments of your time, I would like to tell you about an incredible offer I have for you."

I listened, but remained silent.

"Because of your outstanding credit, Mr. Loonsfoot, Third World of America Credit Corporation is able to offer you a free trial membership in our Third World of America Credit Protection Plan."

I hung up the phone, walked into the bedroom, opened the drawer on the nightstand next to my bed, and took out a .357 magnum revolver. Then I walked around the king-sized bed and took a second .357 out of Esther's nightstand. They were matching pistols, with gleaming black barrels and oak handles.

I lay on the bed and stared up at the ceiling, pointing a pistol at each side of my temples. I thought about the nights that Esther and I spent playing the game. We had made up this game that consisted of lashing out at each other with a single word assault on the other's character. That was the only rule: one word, and one word only, with which to defile the other's reputation. This one word lambasting of each other's ego would often continue late into the night.

"Harlot."

"Lecher."

"Fatuious."

"Fossil."

"Debaucher."

"Obtuse."

"Facile."

"Penile."

"Bony."

"Python."

"Vulpine."

"Lizard."

"Rodent."

The words flew back and forth. The insult's become a pleasure, a sport between us. We looked forward to it and would often make each other angry just to get the game started. At the end of the evening we would check our pistols, sleeping those nights like Cyclopes, each with a large eye trained on the other, hands poised to make a quick draw from the nightstand, our sexual extremities tingling with excitement. It was probably the best sexual co-mingling of our relationship.

But now I am alone, except for Veronica and the pistols. Strange ... when I was living with Esther I had no desire to talk to her. Now that she's gone, I'm falling apart from silence. I looked at the phone number Esther had left behind. I put the pistols down and dialed the number.

A dry voice answered. "Hello," Esther said.

I remained silent on the other end of the line.

Esther recognized the silence.

"Cretin."

“Pubic.”

“Spore.”

“Vulva.”

“Excrement.”

“Diarrhea.”

“Subcutaneous.”

“Pustule.”

Click. It was the sound of Esther hanging up the receiver.

I lay back down on the bed and picked up the twin .357's. A thought occurred to me. Perhaps I need to play the game a little differently, with new rules. I put the pistols down and dialed the number again.

“Please.”

“Negate.”

“Beseech.”

“Fawning.”

“Obsequious.”

Pause. A pause, but not a click.

“That was very clever, Loonsfoot. You're getting quite good at the game. Now, what do you want? Why are you calling me?”

“I love you, Esther. I really do. I've always had a great affection for you.”

“Stop it, Loonsfoot. You don't love me. You're too paranoid to love anybody.”

There is a large expanse that exists between virtual and absolute. My love for Esther was virtual, but my fear of loneliness was absolute. Expressing love was an affectation that was quite clear to Esther. For me, it wasn't that easy, but I wished to try. “Our love is on a plane above the ordinary. Above the common probing kind of love that most of our friends have. Our love is truth and beauty, not simply hormonal rage.”

“Knock it off, Loonsfoot. ‘Truth and beauty’ sounded ethereal when Emily Dickinson said it. ‘But I died for beauty’ is just not you. For you, those are just words ... words you hope will get you what you want. But it won't work anymore. I need more than words. I need what I've found with Clarice.”

“Clarice?”

“Lesbian.”

“Love?”

“Sexual.”

“Odious.”

There was another pause, but not a click. “I should hang up on you. But perhaps I at least owe you an explanation. Clarice has given me something that you never could.”

“What’s that?”

“An orgasm. I’ve never had one before. If this is what love is, then I love it, and Clarice. If this is what lust is, then I love lust, and Clarice. You must know what I’m feeling. You have Marilyn in your life. Don’t you love her? Aren’t you sexual with her? And don’t give me that truth and beauty stuff about your relationship with her.”

“You don’t understand about Marilyn and me.”

“Yes, I do. That’s why I left you. That’s why I love Clarice. She makes me feel good. She gives my life value, makes me feel good about it, and good about myself. Besides the sex, she talks to me, too, for Christ’s sake, not a one-word synopsis of what she thinks are my least desirable features.”

“You don’t understand,” I said.

“You’re right. I don’t understand. I can’t figure out what you’re upset about. You got your wish. I learned to hear the unsaid. I saw the unspoken in your eyes. I saw Marilyn in your eyes instead of me. I was so jealous, I hated myself and everything my life stood for. I felt lonely and unsatisfied. I’m sure you’ve had many of those same feelings, too. Now I have Clarice and you have Marilyn, so let’s just get on with our lives. Be happy, Loonsfoot. I mean it. I wish you and Marilyn happiness.”

“You don’t understand about Marilyn. There was never anything physical with her. She was an ideal, a media vision of the perfect woman. But I gave her up. Those media people are too reality-based for me. I changed her channel for good. I don’t even like the news she does anymore.”

“If she wasn’t real, then why didn’t you say so?”

“Will you come home?”

“Never.”

“Serpent.”

“Lout.”

“Mole.”

Click.

My chest heaved against my heart. I lay down on the bed and picked up the twin .357's and placed them at my temples.

The bullet ripped and chewed its way through his skull and roared out the back of his head like the tail of a comet.

The explosion startled me. I jumped off the bed and raced to the balcony. On the street below, I could see the young boy lying face down in the street. His arms were outstretched and blood was pouring out of a large hole in the back of his head. His feet were bare. They had stolen his new spring-air, radium-colored, electro-pumped tennis shoes.

From the television on my patio, a siren blared. I looked at the screen. There were wounded bodies everywhere. In the background you could hear the rapid fire of automatic weapons interrupting the sweetness of Marilyn Brosco's voice. “Today, a suicide bomber detonated himself in Gaza.”

I felt Veronica claw at my leg. She wanted to be picked up. I lifted her up and cradled her in my arms. She began to purr. I looked into her eyes. She looked back at me with her golden reptile eyes, an interlocking beam connecting us to one another.

“I love you, Veronica. And I know you love me, too. We don't need words. We understand the unsaid; you, the cat who is a woman, and me, the animal who is a man.” I felt the yellow rays of the morning sun on my face. Veronica purred as I held her. “Oh, Veronica, if only we could live like the sun, warm and without death.”

CASE #763639 -- 'RODNEY'

Jacob Edwards

“There are a few things you need to know before we start.” The voice crackled from the car speakers. For a moment he thought the SAT NAV had been possessed, maybe by the rusting spirit of the Microsoft Office paperclip? But no, it was off altogether. He frowned at himself in the rear-view mirror. What, then?

“We shan’t be needing an interview,” the voice continued. “You’re hired. Also, no abbreviations, please. I detest all text talk.”

Oh, of course. It was his phone – an SMS being read to him by his car. And people used to think *Knight Rider* was cool.

The voice broke out again, robotic and impersonal against the background hiss. “I’m afraid my previous factotum rather abused the privilege of having opposable thumbs. Incidentally, you should turn around now. You’re driving the wrong way.”

It reminded him of those old vinyl records where a suave, disembodied instructor talked you step-by-step through the finer points of ballroom dancing or whatever. And what did it mean, “driving the wrong way?” If the interview was off, then he wasn’t going anywhere ... was he?

“He also used emoticons, which, I’m sure you’ll agree, is akin to ten thousand monkeys trying to reproduce a Picasso using finger paints. Head south down to Jimboomba.”

There was, he decided, something quite disconcerting about taking instructions from his own phone. Manipulative, almost. As if he were Colonel Klink from *Hogan’s Heroes* being led a merry dance. *Still*, he shrugged, pulling a u-turn and making for the South East Freeway, *a job’s a job*.

“Jimboomba, by the way, is the Aboriginal word for loud thunder, no rain. Though I don’t think that’s relevant to the case. A straightforward, gone-missing job.”

He hit the on-ramp and accelerated up to speed, checking his mirrors while a great hulking four-wheel-drive bullied its way forward, refusing to let him merge. He braked hard, wobbled in behind it and

made a back-to-front peace sign at the driver.

“We’ve been engaged by one Gertrude Holmes. Yes. She’s a retired farmer – pineapples, I believe – who wants us to investigate the disappearance of Rodney Holmes.”

The four-wheel-drive slowed down in front of him, dropping with a belligerent pant to 20k under the limit. *Like a bull*, he decided. *A snorting monstrosity charging on instinct, then lost and bewildered when there’s nothing in front of it.*

Shaking his head, he pulled into the middle lane and sped up again. The four-wheel-drive lurched from its reverie, accelerating to keep its bull bar just ahead of him. He sighed. How far was it to Jimboomba, again?

“Should take you about half an hour,” proclaimed the de facto voice of his new employer. “Take the toll roads. We bill for expenses. Text me when you arrive. You’ll need to describe everything. Words are paramount!”

* * *

Gertrude Holmes lived in a sprawling old Queenslander, first property on the left as he turned onto the dirt access road. A rather wild, dark green hedge fenced the yard, its stiff, zigzag branches sporting a cornucopia of white flowers and small, red berries. *Lime berries*, he noted. Funny that they should be red, not green.

There wasn’t much of a lawn, and what space there might have been was covered in fruit trees – lemon, banana, avocado, custard apple, even a few Barbados cherry – which afforded the house an unusual degree of privacy. He brought the car to a trundling stop outside the front gate, and paused while a small cloud of dust puffed up from under the wheels and carried on in the car’s stead.

His phone beeped as he tweaked the car door and clambered out into the mid-morning swelter. SMS. He squinted against the sunlight.

[You should be there shortly, or have just arrived. Tell me what you see. Use adjectives. Give substance to your impressions and these will inform my deductions.]

Dutifully, he typed out a description of the garden, and the airy old Queenslander that stood before him, its wind chimes becalmed above a laminated coffee table and cushion-strapped wicker chairs that lay higgledy-piggledy across the breadth of its open veranda. *[It’s as if several people just upped and left]*, he thumbed. *[Like the Marie Celeste. Nice enough old place but a bit creaky*

looking. And it could do with a new coat of paint.]

He made his way across the garden and up the four warped steps that led to the front veranda. He knocked tentatively on the wooden beam beside the fly screen door, and was rewarded with a loud cry of, “Coming, dear. Coming!”

His phone beeped again. *[That’s ‘Mary’ Celeste, actually. Common misconception. Now tell me about Gertrude Holmes, first chance you have, please. Clothes. Hair. Demeanor. Quick sketch.]*

Gertrude Holmes turned out to be a tall, large-framed old lady about eighty years old, he guessed – her skin weather-beaten and crinkly and her long, dark grey hair tied back with a ribbon. She stomped forward on pink, pom-pom slippers and pushed open the screen door.

He found himself momentarily bedazzled by the cultural interplay of her brightly patterned skirt and blouse, which didn’t match, and by the vulture-hunched, shadowy outline of her large, black-framed glasses. *[She’s like Dame Edna Everage!]* he thumbed blind. *[Grey hair, though, not lavender.]*

Mrs. Holmes peered quizzically at him until he slipped the phone back into his jeans pocket. “Hello, young man. Do I know you?”

“No, Mrs. Holmes. It is Mrs. Holmes, isn’t it? Oh, good. Hi. I’m from the, uh, Flame Tree Detective Agency. You called us earlier about –”

“Oh, yes,” Gertrude exclaimed. “Thank you so much for coming, dear. Come in, won’t you? No, no. Leave your shoes on. That’s all right.”

His phone beeped as she turned and bustled off down the hallway, something about her retreating figure conjuring in his mind the image of a Womble in drag. He shook his head and glanced down. Another SMS.

[Please look when you are texting. That came through very jumbled and took me several seconds to decode. Also, you wasted 98 characters, which is valuable space!]

Frowning, he hurried after Mrs. Holmes as she led him through the centre of the house and into the kitchen at the back. “Please sit down, dear.” She pulled out two wooden chairs from under the old dining table. “Oh, thank you so much for coming.”

“That’s not a problem, Mrs. Holmes. Now, what –”

“Please call me Gertrude, dear. ‘Mrs. Holmes’ makes me sound

dreadfully old.”

“Okay, Gert ”

“Or Gertie. My husband used to call me Gertie.”

“Oh.” He frowned. “Is your husband ?”

“Yes, dear. He passed away, oh, what, twenty years ago. That’s when we gave up farming and sold off most of the property. It’s just me and my daughter now.”

He felt down for his phone, and hesitated. “And Rodney?”

“Ah, yes.” Mrs. Holmes reached under her glasses and rubbed a knobby finger against the crinkles there. “Poor Rodney.” There was a long silence, then she nodded to herself and veered over towards the fridge. “Would you like some lemonade, dear? Homemade. Did you see the lemon trees?”

“Er, yes, I did. I will. Please.”

“We used to have forty acres, you know.” Mrs. Holmes took a pitcher from the fridge and went in search of glasses. “Not lemon trees, of course. No, mostly goats and horses. Now we’ve only two and a half. Acres, that is. Such a shame, don’t you think? Still, I suppose it was the best thing to do. There you go.”

“Thank you.”

“And I suppose two and a half is still quite a lot. I’ve got my fruit trees to look after, and Regina that’s my daughter Regina and I still have plenty of space to ourselves.”

“And Rodney?”

“Oh, yes!” Mrs. Holmes started, almost spilling her lemonade. “Rodney! Oh, thank you so much for coming, dear. The police won’t help, and with Regina away I really don’t know what to do.”

“That’s all right, Mrs. Holmes. I’m sure we’ll think of something. Now, you suggested to my employer my colleague that Rodney might have been kidnapped?”

“Oh, no, dear.” Mrs. Holmes puckered her face until it looked like a stewed apple. “Not *kidnapped*. No, Rodney’s not a kid anymore.”

“Well, they still *call* it kidnapping, Mrs. Holmes, no matter how old ”

“No, no,” she continued, shaking her head, “he turned six only last month. Oh, the poor dear. Why the police aren’t interested, I just cannot comprehend.”

“Mmm,” he agreed, and took a non-committal sip of lemonade. Mrs.

Holmes tut-tutted to herself and cleaned her glasses on a faded tea towel.

“Um, if he *hasn't* been kidnapped, Mrs. Holmes, then what do you think's happened to him?”

She blinked at him like an owl ... well, as owlishly as you could get while wearing a skirt and blouse of Technicolor garishness. “That's obvious, dear. Rodney's been *stolen*.”

“Stolen.” He took another sip of lemonade, swirled it around in his mouth and winced as he swallowed it. “Of course.”

He gave this a few moments to compute it didn't and then typed out a surreptitious text message under the table.

“Tell me, Mrs. Holmes this is very nice lemonade, by the way. Just right for summer.”

“Thank you, dear. It's my mum's old recipe, bless her.”

“Very tangy. But tell me, how do you know that oh, excuse me.”

His phone beeped. [*Ah. You'd best tread carefully. She could become emotional. Please examine the back yard. Describe the trees and grass. Pay close attention to the clothes line.*]

He scrutinized the message as if it had appeared on the beach overnight, written in washed-up seaweed. “Sorry about that, Mrs. Holmes. Um, do you think I could have a look out back for a minute?”

Mrs. Holmes had a large back yard, somewhat dry and overgrown, with long, brown grass and a dilapidated wooden fence around its border. Beatnik trees and shrubs sprawled up against the rotting planks. There was a lychee, its leaves splotchy and diseased, ferns, mother-in-law's tongues, several rhododendrons, and a rampant, unpruned oleander boasting pinky-white flowers and an aura of free love.

At the centre of the yard presided a rusting old Hills Hoist, wound to the lowest setting and without even a smattering of clothes on its spindly, Dali-esque skeleton. It did have an old rag knotted around its pole just above the handle which, if anything, made it look even more forlorn, like a once-mighty galleon with a moth-eaten flag and no sails.

He said as much in a hurried text message, then turned to Mrs. Holmes.

“Tell me, Mrs. Holmes: how do you know Rodney hasn't just run away from home?”

She shook her dimpled chin. “No chance of that, dear. He couldn’t go more than five or six meters.”

“Er, I see. And that’s because...?”

“Why, because I keep him tethered to the clothesline, of course.”

He blinked. His phone beeped. SMS.

“Would you mind repeating that, Mrs. Holmes? Actually, hang on. Excuse me for a second...”

[As I suspected. Her appearance – and that of her house – suggests that she lives alone (at least most of the time), and the rag on the clothesline’s a giveaway.]

Was it? He glared suspiciously at the tattered cloth in question. But what was ? Beep. Another SMS.

[Look carefully. You’ll see it’s been chewed through – some time ago, by the state of the lawn. And oleander is poisonous in large doses (relative to body size).]

He read the message twice, then threw a quick glance at Mrs. Holmes. She was looking forlornly out at the empty yard, like King Aegeas scanning the horizon for white sails.

“Bit of thunder around,” she nodded, “but I don’t think we’ll have any rain.”

“Er, no. No, I don’t suppose ”

No rain, but he felt droplets of sweat pooling around his eyes, stinging at him. Chewed through? Poisonous? But ? Beep. Another message from on high.

[Phone the daughter to confirm – she’ll have moved out long ago – and tell our client the bad news. Poor, senile old thing. She probably even buried him herself.]

He felt his eyes pull wide. Buried him? *Buried him?*

“Are you all right there, dear? I have some lemonade inside if the heat’s getting to you. Homemade, you know. My mum’s recipe.”

“Um, no. That’s okay, Mrs. Holmes. I’ll, er ”

Buried? As in, dead and buried? Beep.

[Sorry your first case wasn’t more interesting. Never mind. Your descriptions are top notch and you’ve a good eye for detail. Who’d have thought, though? Nyaaah!]

He digested this as best he could ... tethers, grass, oleander flowers. Rubbing the stubble on his cheek, he turned to Mrs. Holmes.

“This may seem a bit odd, Mrs. Holmes, but, well...”

“Yes, dear?”

She blinked at him from behind her Edna Everage glasses until he

shrugged in resignation and let the question drop unvoiced from his lips.
Is Rodney a – ?

“Is something the matter, dear?”

“No,” he winced. “Never mind. Um, did you say something about lemonade, Mrs. Holmes?”

“Why, yes, dear! Come back inside, won’t you? I’ll have some poured in a jiffy.”

They turned their backs on the empty, rundown yard and retreated into the relative cool of the house.

“And while you’re doing that,” he asked, “could I possibly have your daughter’s number? Regina, wasn’t it? There’s just one or two details I need to clear up.”

“Why, of course, dear, of course. Oh!” Mrs. Holmes stopped abruptly, lemonade pitcher in hand. “Why, Regina doesn’t know, does she? About Rodney? Oh, she’ll be all a-tither!”

“Actually, I think she *might* know. You see...” He gestured awkwardly towards the screen door. Mrs. Holmes blinked at him with all the comprehension of a sand-draining hourglass cursor. “Or, um, if she doesn’t,” he continued hurriedly, “I’ll make sure I break it to her gently.”

Or maybe, he thought, the old girl’s daughter can be the one who does the explaining. Tell her that Rodney’s not missing at all; that he got loose and poisoned himself on oleander flowers. Inquisitive, voracious old goat. He shook his head sadly and sipped the bitter tang of lemonade. “Then before you know it,” he murmured, “you find yourself at Jimboomba and it’s all thunder, no rain.”

Mrs. Holmes looked up from her floral patterned address book of telephone numbers. “What’s that, dear? Did you say something?”

“No, Mrs. Holmes. Nothing important. Just thinking. About the job, you know. About ”

His phone bleated.

[About the future...]

Tequila Dawn

Bob Norman

Fragmented bits of information, like gleaming shards of glass, sparkled in my semi-conscious mind, slowly becoming a coherent thought. I sensed a warbling spin. There was no visual perspective, only a throbbing sensation from deep within my skull.

I tried opening my eyes but the lids wouldn't budge. My brow arched but there was nothing to see, just a stabbing pain in my forehead. I was still for a second, letting the pain subside.

I was breathing through my nose, not getting enough air, so I opened my mouth to suck in larger volumes. My lips were parched. I slid my tongue over my teeth, hoping for a little moisture. My tongue felt as if it was made of burlap and my teeth seemed to be coated with fur. I swallowed ... it hurt, and my throat felt as if I had gargled with gravel.

Genuinely concerned about my condition, I fought back the throbbing pain in my head and tried again to open my eyes. This time, as I strained harder, the lids slowly parted the glue-like substance holding them together bit by bit.

Instantly my eyes exploded with pain as intense light stabbed into my fully dilated pupils. I clenched them shut, trying to raise my left arm to cover my face, but my arm wouldn't move. I tried the right arm, to no avail. Growling with anger and frustration, I kicked out with my legs, but they too seemed bound.

I jerked my entire body about, mimicking a fish out of water. After flopping around this way for a second or two, I figured I was lying on the ground somewhere with something wrapped tightly around me.

I willed myself still, then, tentatively, I peered out between squinted eyes lids. I was lying in the dirt at what looked to be a campsite. I was facing a row of sooty boulders that were making up a campfire pit. Thirty feet beyond the campsite I could see a lake and beyond the lake, foothills with a white hot sun just starting to peak over the top.

I rolled awkwardly away from the fire pit and the glare of the morning sun. I seemed to be "shrink-wrapped" from chin to toe in a sleeping bag. As if the present revelations weren't enough of a mind-bending experience, the hair on the back of my neck started to raise up as if alarmed by a sixth sense of

impending danger.

Slowly, I let my gaze track around in the direction sensed. I really didn't want to digest any more information than I already had, but a primeval urge seemed to have taken hold of me. Then I saw it, directly in front of me. Not ten feet away was a vintage 1960's automobile. It possessed a field of dark energy all its own. Its chromed front-end grill work loomed up before me.

The big glass headlights seemed to be staring down at me from on high. The bug-splattered grill work looked like a maniacal grin. The whole thing suddenly creaked, and I thought I could hear the sound of gravel crunching under its tires.

I felt the tension in me ratcheting up to an even higher level. Fear started trickling through me. I believed, in my heart of hearts, that this was a mechanical demon attempting to free itself from its resting place. It was going to trap me underneath it. It was going to drag me down the shoreline into the lake. There, it would drown me in a few inches of swampy, green gel. I would be helplessly trapped, struggling in my sleeping bag while staring up in horror through rippling, stagnant water at the morning sun.

As I thrashed about, the car seemed to groan even louder, savoring the panicked offering wiggling about on the ground in front of it. As frightened as I was, my struggle was short-lived. In a matter of seconds, I had to stop.

In my struggle to release myself from the clutches of the bag, I had raised a cloud of choking dust around me. I was overcome by a fit of coughing, rattling me to my bones. As my coughing finally started to subside, my mind was caught up in one of those moments you see in the movies, a dreamy, confused vision of the events the night before flashing by, leading up to the present situation.

I had been drinking with friends around a campfire. At the conclusion of the evening, I crawled into my sleeping bag fully clothed, my trusty hunting knife and boots still on. I had been too inebriated to struggle with getting them off. Undoubtedly, they were contributing to my present difficulties.

Now, fully recovered from the coughing fit, and with a fundamental

understanding of my predicament, I was ready to think of an escape. My wrestling with the bag had proved futile, but a spark of an idea came to me. I tried twisting my right arm around, hoping to free it enough to reach down for the hunting knife attached to my belt. I would cut my way out of the bag.

Time was running out for me; the bag was getting very warm. I was perspiring so badly now that my t-shirt was clinging to the long-sleeved flannel shirt I had on over it. And the flannel shirt, in turn, was clinging to the lining of the sleeping bag. All of these layers seemed to be working to binding me up even tighter in the bag.

Working my arm down from its folded position against my chest, I was finally able to brush my fingertips against the heel of the knife. This renewed my confidence. I continued the fight until I grasped the entire handle of the knife in my hand.

I took a moment to rest, catching my breath, but there was little comfort in rest. The morning sun was up over the hills now and radiated down on the bag, making it unbearably hot and humid. Adding to my discomfort was the sun reflecting off the chromework of the gleaming beast, forcing me to keep my eyes squinted while increasing the throbbing in my head.

Caught up in the sleeping bag, so vulnerable, all my senses were amplified. Again I heard the creaking. There was the glare of the sun and the taste of dirt in my mouth, my nostrils flooded with the smell of rank oil collected on the undercarriage of the car. My fully stimulated imagination seemed to reinforce my mind's eye, seeing the car as an apparition of a malevolent beast.

I thrashed about, frantically trying to draw the knife out of its leather sheath. The sleeping bag, bound tightly at my elbows, would not allow me to raise my arm any further. My whole body quaked with the effort. Then, as I was about to surrender to this horrific fate, I heard the stitching in a seam of the bag starting to pop. It was a small thing, but it rallied my spirit and carried me through.

The knife was free!

I nearly smiled, but then I found I was facing another crushing defeat. To my dismay, the blade of the knife was being held flat against my leg by the python-like sleeping bag. I felt myself sinking into a pitch black well of despair. I took a short break to catch my breath and tried to think of what to do next.

I decided I had no choice. Since I couldn't raise my arm any higher, I would have to slip the point of the knife blade into the fabric of the bag from where it was, and then pull the knife up with my forearms slicing the bag open, lengthwise, as if gutting it.

The first step was to get the blade perpendicular to my leg and the bag. That meant straightening my wrist out, bringing it to its natural position at my side, not pointing down as it now did, while gripping the knife. I felt a tinge of satisfaction as I straightened it out.

The lining and shell of the bag began to give way to the sharp tip of the blade as it crept up and out.

At last, the knife was at a ninety degree angle from my body with the hilt flush against the inside lining. I could peer down and see the knife sticking out of the bag at my waist level. I worked to get my other hand across my body and onto the handle. This was another laborious task seeming to take a lifetime.

With both hands now on the handle and my arms still held tightly to my body, I concentrated on using what strength I had left in my forearms to pull the blade up. At first there was no movement at all. Then, slowly ... ever so slowly ... the blade started moving up, slicing through the bag.

By the time the knife was at my chest, it was moving smoothly and swiftly. I pointed the toes of my boots down against the bottom seam of the bag to keep the bag stretched taut against the sharp edge of the knife.

My elbows came free next, allowing me to extend them out for more leverage. Then my shoulders were free. The knife flashed past my chin, over my head and out of my weakened hands, clattering against the stones of the fire pit behind me.

Cold morning air washed over me, and pieces of stuffing from the bag showered down around me as if I were in a ticker-tape parade. I scampered out of the bag, crawling across the dusty ground to get away from the car.

I rested against the rocks of the campfire pit. As I sat there, panting for breath, I heard chuckling behind me. I turned to see my two

camping buddies staring down at me from a picnic table not ten feet away. I hadn't seen them or heard them earlier.

"Good morning, Sunshine," one of them said. They both had wicked smiles.

Then the other said, "Are we having a difficult morning?"

Evidently they had sat in silence, watching the whole event. Now they bellowed with laughter. I followed their gaze to the object of their amusement. It was my sleeping bag, a twisted, ragged mess, its stuffing strewn out across the ground.

It looked as if the car had been chewing on the bag with its chromed maw, and then spat it out. I heard the creaking sound of the car again and realized, this time, that it was metal expanding as the morning sun warmed it.

By now, the laughter of my friends bounced off the foothills on the far side of the lake, returning as jovial echoes, seeming to mock me even further. I stretched out on the bare dirt in humiliation, oblivious to the pine needles, cigarette butts, bits of potato chips, and empty beer cans strewn about with ants silently crawling through them.

One of my friends bent over and set a tall, clear, glass bottle down next to my face and said, "Here you go, sleepyhead. Looks like you could use a swallow." There were about two inches of amber colored liquid still in the bottle. I got a whiff of it on the morning breeze ... tequila ... about the last thing I needed at the moment.

I felt my stomach starting to tighten up and thought to myself, this is not the happy tequila dawn I had hoped for last night. Listening to my friends, I could tell there would soon be another tall tale added to the campfire lore we already had.

If I told it, it would be the story of a brave camper fighting hand to hand against two cunning enemies: one, a clinging, serpent-like creature intending to smother its victim in its clutches, and the other, a menacing, metal gargoyle stalking nearby, waiting for a chance to pounce.

My friends, however, would tell it as a few too many libations and the ramifications that followed.

But really, what kind of story would that be?

The Fly and the Doe

Chris Koch

On a day that corresponded with the one-week anniversary of his having hatched, a fly flew through a forest in search of a relatively fresh dung pile. He flew, somewhat distracted by his own thoughts concerning the precise nature of the dung pile that he hoped to find and, on the loftier end of a fly's thought-spectrum, what the purpose and calling of his brief life might be, when he became ensnared in a spider's web.

"Oh, man!" he thought. "Now I'm really screwed!"

The spider, who had been keeping a still and patient vigil in the shadows, sprang into action, making her way toward the fly with a methodical tight-rope walk. It seemed to the fly that the spider was smiling and that there may have even been a small bit of drool emulating from her frighteningly jagged orifice. The spider said something but it was in a foreign language—maybe German or Russian—the fly couldn't tell.

"Listen," the fly pleaded as he struggled, "I know that according to the laws of Life as it has evolved on the planet Earth, your job is to catch and eat small insects and that I, being a small insect, have initiated a series of behaviors which will leave me dead and you somewhat better off."

The spider continued his approach without the slightest regard to the fly's rambling monologue.

"And I further acknowledge that I have nothing with which to bargain in an attempt to redeem my pathetic life. I own nothing that you desire other than my juicy insides which, were I to offer them in trade, I would have no life to save anyway."

The spider again said something in its harsh, guttural language, which ultimately meant, "*Stop your jabbering, breakfast!*" But the fly was unable to decipher the message, so he continued.

"I would really, *REALLY*, appreciate it if you would let me go,

just this once. I promise to devote the remaining few weeks of my life to your service by leading other small insects to your lair, so if you let me go, you could potentially gain *several* meals my size. Whadaya say, huh?"

The spider's unfathomable response meant, "*I have never before encountered such an annoying meal,*" and it moved in close to run the program sequence entitled, **bind_kill_eat.exe**.

The fly shut his eyes and prepared for the worst, offering up fervent prayers, supplications, and apologies to anyone or anything that might care to listen. Then, in a suspiciously coincidental moment, just as the spider was about to begin wrapping the fly in a tangle of sticky silk, a beautiful doe walked by as it grazed and inadvertently broke the web, squishing the spider and releasing the fly from bondage.

The fly was so overwhelmed with joy at its liberation that he didn't know what to do but fly frantically forth, attempting to get as far from his near-death experience as possible in the shortest amount of time. He landed on a leaf to catch his breath, and there pondered the magnitude of what just happened.

The first thing he did was rummage through his really short short-term memory to determine whether any of his last-ditch prayers included promises that would be difficult or unpleasant to keep—a promise to join a monastery or, even worse, a promise to abstain from eating manure—but as far as he could recall, there was nothing.

Still, the fact that he had been released just moments after he had prayed was so profound to him that he felt compelled to take some kind of action in order to remove the oppressive weight of gratitude that he felt. Gratitude, after all, is not a characteristic for which a fly is best known.

Of course, this put him in the difficult situation of having to decide to whom or what he should express said gratitude. Was it the doe that had heard his mournful cries? Or was it some invisible controlling entity which guided the doe to provide aid? This second possibility was too much for the fly's tiny mind to process, so he decided to approach the doe directly, since she was a tangible being and also had a nice, meaty smell that appealed to his fly-like instincts. He flew to her and made several attempts at landing on her ear before finding a spot that was not sensitive enough to cause her to flick him off involuntarily.

"Excuse me," he said.

The doe stopped munching, waited for a moment, shook her head, and

continued on.

“Excuse me. I really am trying to get your attention, Miss Doe. Can you hear me?”

The doe looked around to make sure that she wasn't being tricked by some sneaky carnivore. “Precisely who is addressing me?” she asked.

“Well, I am a fly, you see, and I was trapped in a spider's web. The spider was just about to ensnare me in a tangle of webbing and slurp up my chemically pureed innards, so I prayed I suppose prayer is what you'd call it and at that precise moment you walked by, demolished the web with your left, front hoof, turned the spider into a pile of guts and legs and set me free, so I have come to express my appreciation for your very heroic deed!” The fly made his delivery with great enthusiasm.

“Wow,” said the deer, “I had no idea all of this was going on. As far as I'm concerned, I was just out having breakfast.”

“That may be true,” the fly retorted, “but you stepped *exactly* in the right spot, *exactly* when I needed you.”

“Well,” she explained, “the fact that I walk is simply a matter of my being an earth-dwelling animal with legs. It is what I do almost constantly, as a matter of fact. I walk and walk and walk. The only time I am not walking is when I have found an abundance of food in one locale or when I am asleep.” She wrapped her tongue around a juicy clump of grass, tore off as much as she could and munched for a spell. “As for the sequential correlation between your having been trapped in a web and my left, front foot invading the same space,” she continued, “I would be inclined to employ Occam's Razor and assume that it was merely a coincidence.”

The fly thought about this for a moment. “I tend to agree. However, I still feel as if I am carrying around a burdensome weight of obligation that I need to dispel. If an invisible entity did, in fact, send you my way, it really doesn't matter much, because I have no idea who it was or how I should respond, so my most reasonable course of action is to choose you as the recipient of my heart-felt gratitude,” the fly said, with a bow.

“Unnecessary,” she said, matter-of-factly, “but okay ... expression of gratitude accepted. You may go in peace.”

The fly kissed the doe on the ear (though she didn't notice),

wished her good grazing and a long happy life, and flew off to continue his search for a good dung pile. Fortunately, the doe had just deposited a significant load and he didn't have to travel very far at all.

Over the next few days, the fly enjoyed his life with the fresh sense of appreciation that usually accompanies having nearly perished. He also enjoyed the free abundance of calories that the doe provided several times a day in neat little piles on the ground, so while the fly had initially intended to commence with its simple, self-serving lifestyle, he found that his love and appreciation for the doe only increased and, to his annoyance, so did the pesky sense of debt and obligation.

He tried to ignore it by chasing other flies around his dung piles and working diligently on his aerial acrobatics, but every activity that he enjoyed was underlined by the truth that he would have been converted into spider-flesh and a silk-bag-filled-with-exoskeleton if it weren't for the doe.

"If it weren't for the doe, I wouldn't be savoring this dung," he would think, or

"If it weren't for the doe, I wouldn't be flying freely through the forest," or

"If it weren't for the doe, I wouldn't be copulating with these female flies."

At last the burden became too great for him, and he pledged to do something special for her. But what? What could he offer her?

As it turned out, the fly fancied himself as somewhat of a poet. No one really thinks of insects being capable of art or literature, and perhaps the majority of them aren't, but the fly had a long-standing love of language and something like a knack for prose. And so, he put his mind to the task of poetically expressing his appreciation. At last, he felt that the product of his heart's best effort was ready for presentation, and he approached boldly.

"Hello, again!" he said, after landing on her ear.

The doe stopped munching, waited for a moment, swallowed, and then spoke. "The fly, right? The existential fly? How are you?"

"I am well, thank you very much! I've been really overcome with a sense of purpose since our last exchange, motivated to produce something of value that I could give to you as a token of my gratitude. If you have a moment, I would love to share what I have created," he said, with an air of smugness.

“I don’t see any predators around, and I am content with the current offering of edible vegetation,” she said, in a rather bored tone. “You may proceed.”

The fly cleared his proboscis, and began:

“My Dear, Deer

by a fly

My dear

My dearest dear

My dearest, dear, deer

I don’t find it easy to know where to begin, see,

But you have ignited a fire within me

My eyes, though compound, they see only you

I watch you with longing and strive to be true

You’ve opened the floodgates of my heart’s expression

This is just the first poem of many, I’m guessin’

And now I expect that there’s no way of stopping

You’ve set my wings free and then fed me your droppings

So each day I live, I will give you my love

Because you saved me from that fucking spider.”

The fly concluded and although the doe couldn’t see this, he had a look of expectation on his face, as if he were waiting for the entire forest to break into a deafening applause.

“Well,” said the doe, “that was ... that was ... I didn’t know that a fly could write ... poetry ... like ... that.”

“Thank you! Thank you, my beloved liberator!” he said. “I really wanted you to like it and I am *very* glad that you did!”

She paused for a moment, to reflect. “Did I say that I liked it? Hmm.”

Although the fly was a bit hurt by this last remark, he nevertheless wished her good grazing and a long healthy life without betraying his emotions. He buzzed away, not feeling dismayed or discouraged as much as determined – he simply had to do better and he would.

He spent a good amount of time analyzing his first offering to try and figure out how it was flawed in either content or form, but for the life

of him he couldn't imagine why anyone wouldn't like My Dear, Deer, so he just decided to wipe the slate clean and try again. Maybe something a little different this time — more of a free-style approach.

“THE DREAM

by a fly

*In my dreams, we are together
You are not 500,000 times my size
And I am not a shit-sucking insect
Birds. We are birds.
We fly and build nests and stuff
We migrate South in the Winter
We migrate North in the Spring
We do all kinds of things
And when you have fleas
I pick them off of you
Because I do love you.”*

“That’s nice,” said the deer, “I really hate fleas.”

The fly, once again feeling as if he was being denied an appropriately adequate response, paced back and forth for a moment on her ear and then erupted.

“Okay! What! What the hell is it?” he asked. “Just ... can you just tell me what it is? Do you not like birds or something? Are you saying that you would not want to be a bird? Christ sakes! Just about everyone wants to be a bird!”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa!” she snapped. “Don’t get your wings all tangled, buddy! Birds are alright. I don’t mind birds in the least! What’s your problem?”

He was not expecting her to care quite so much and quickly deflated. “Oh, I dunno!” he said, “I just ... I’m not feeling like you’re really diggin’ my stuff here, and I worked really hard on it!”

The doe let a long stream of air out through her nostrils — a sigh, I suppose. “Alright,” she inquired. “What exactly is going on here? What is it that you want me to do? What kind of mutually beneficial arrangement could possibly be enjoyed between a fly and a doe, anyway?”

The fly was stunned by this levelling expression of honesty. Humbled and broken, he sat silently, nervously flicking his wings together until the grave

truth of her statement reached him like an epiphany, if a fly can be said to have an epiphany.

“You know,” he sighed, “you’re right. You are absolutely right, of course. I know that our friendship is strange ... *beyond* strange. I know that we can’t produce offspring or anything like that. That isn’t what I was after anyway I don’t even really like kids! I just look at you or think about you and my microscopic nervous system starts going all haywire! I mean, I would be a pile of spider waste if it weren’t for you, do you understand that? I am so grateful for the fact that you saved my life that I don’t even know what to do with myself! And then, on top of that, your feces are just, like, totally delicious! Why are you so nice to me all of the time if you don’t want me around?”

Her heart swelled with compassion. “Listen. First of all I never, *ever* said that I didn’t want you around, okay? I mean, that is just not true. I like you. I like our little chats and all. Second, let’s get something straight ... I am not really doing anything all that special here. Your being set free was the result of my taking a simple step like one of the thousands that I take every day. We’ve already discussed the fact that walking is just what I do as part of my life. Well, so is crapping, by the way. For mammals, it isn’t involuntary like it is for birds or insects we do have a little control over placement and timing and things like that but it is simply a by-product of the huge amount of roughage that we take in every day. Don’t get me wrong, I’m really glad that you enjoy it and that it provides you with nourishment, but I’m not exactly defecating for your benefit.”

“I knew there was something about birds!” he pouted.

“Hush! You are not listening to me!” she said. She took a moment to regain composure. “Can’t we just hang out?” she suggested. “I mean, just be in the same space together with no expectations?” The fly looked down at his feet and dug his toe into her ear, which was entirely imperceptible to her. “And you’ve got to get this whole idea of thanking me out of your head. I’m not a fly-savior!” she asserted. “I’m just a doe, doing the deeds that a doe does in a doe’s life! Really! I’m not trying to lead you on, or give you special attention, or anything of the sort. I’m just trying to survive and thrive like everyone else in the forest.”

Now the already downtrodden insect felt very foolish besides. How could he have allowed himself to believe that this perfect essence of beauty, serenity, and grace had special feelings for him? Who really likes flies? No one! This slap of reality was brutal, and it took him a moment to choke it back. He finally spoke, slowly, and with sincere resolve.

“I get it. I truly get it. I’ve been trying too hard. But I hope you understand that I’ve only been trying so hard because ...” He took a short circular flight and hovered in front of her gigantic face, “because you are very dear to me! I adore you, I really do! And I honestly say that with no expectations. You told me that you have become part of my life simply by doing what a deer does. Well, I guess I am just doing what any fly would do if he were saved from certain death by the most beautiful creature on the planet! This is who I am, dammit! I am a man ... I mean ... I am a *fly* who appreciates beauty and freedom and friendship. I’ve just got to express the joy that I feel when I’m in your presence and if you can’t deal with that, then ... then ... *I guess I’ll just have to go!*”

He over-dramatically repositioned himself so that his back was toward her but he could still monitor her facial expression out of the corner of one of the segments of one of his eyes in hopes that he might detect a modicum of sympathy. Beyond his wildest hope, she smiled softly and he thought he saw her doe eyes fill just slightly. “Oh, I can deal with that, my sweet fly, I can deal with that. Now come over here and give me a hug! I mean ... just ... hang out on my ear or something!”

And they *did* hang out, relaxing in the forest and enjoying each other’s company for the next few weeks, but then he died, of course, because flies just don’t live very long.

She was a very strong and smart doe, so she understood the cycle of life and accepted all phases of it. Of course she missed him, but she wasn’t crushed or despondent by any means. For the most part, she kept their friendship in a special, private place in her heart. On only one known occasion was she asked to express her feelings about his passing, to which she replied:

“You know, I really miss his poetry.”

“A painting remembered from another hemisphere with whole suns sinking into the canvas, something caught in the center and trying to exit...”

—JULIA BLOCH, *Mount Airy*



NOTES



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PAOLO C. MEJIA is an experimental artist that works with formalism. He uses the processes and materials of art to experiment with the avenues of where it may lead. His experimental works result in abstractions that connote ephemeral conditions of the mind. The abstract pieces shown are just a few examples.

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LANCE NIZAMI has no formal training in the Arts. He is active in the world's most competitive profession, yet without an institutional appointment or income. He started writing poetry during a long airplane flight in 2010, and has written much since then, in-flight.

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GAIL POTOCKI uses deep symbolist narratives to focus our attention where we don't often enough ourselves. She frequently employs feminine beauty to lure the viewer who, once engaged, often discovers necessary and sometimes painful truths weaving through the unfolding story. Her second book, *Opened Apples*, will be released this Fall.

RACHEL REYNOLDS is a student of Creative Writing and the Classics at the University of Redlands. Her poems have appeared in *The Rattling Wall*, *Plain China*, *Mosaic*, and *Zaum Magazine*. She is the recipient of two first place prizes in the annual Jean Burden Prize for Poetry contest.

When SERAH RHODES is not laughing with friends, working in the library, or scurrying to finish a writing assignment, she is delighting in the six really interesting people who happen to call her mom.

CINDY RINNE creates art and writes in San Bernardino, CA. She was the Featured Poet for *The Village Poets of Sunland-Tujunga*. Recent works appear in *Lily Literary Review*, *The Sand Canyon Review*, *Inlandia*, *A Literary Journal*, *Phantom Seed*, *The Halfpenny Marvel*, and she's working towards her first collection of poems.

NINA ROMANO authored two poetry collections: *Cooking Lessons* and *Coffeehouse Meditations*, and is co-author of *Writing in a Changing World*. Her latest poetry collection, *She Wouldn't Sing at My Wedding*, is forthcoming. Her short story collection, *The Other Side of the Gates*, will be published by Kitsune Books in 2013.

BRIAN ROTH's circuitous path to poetry began in the volcanic fields of Arizona, where he was born and raised in Flagstaff. After receiving an engineering degree from the Colorado School of Mines, he worked in corporate endurance. Currently he is pursuing an MFA in Poetry from Mills College in Oakland.

ITALIA RUOTOLO was born in Naples-Italy. After Fine Art Graduation she worked as a goldsmith and designer, which has great influence in the development of her style always in searching for the preciousness of the matter. Her works have as many influences as many references there are in her artistic ideals, ranging from classical art to art nouveau and pop art.

MARSHA SCHUH holds a BA, MBA, MA (composition) and MFA (poetry). Marsha's work has appeared in *Pacific Review*, *Ghost Town*, *Badlands*, and *Meat*. She also co-authored a college textbook, *Computer Networking*, published by Prentice-Hall. She teaches English composition and poetry at CSUSB. She lives with her husband Dave in Ontario.

FELIX P. SEPULVEDA was crowned 62 years ago in Redlands. He began as a prince of observation before he became king of the word processor. His majesty has decided to write about the wars and coronations he has experienced. He has decreed anyone may read his scripts. He begins with his family.

DJ SWYKERT'S short fiction and poetry have been published in *The Monarch Review*, *Detroit News*, *Alpha Beat Press*, *Scissors and Spackle*, *Spittoon*, *Barbaric Yawp* and *BULL*. He is represented by LifeTime Media in NYC. *Alpha Wolves*, a novel, will be released in April, 2012. He is a wolf expert.

MICHAEL TESAURO, 25, is an MFA student at Chapman. He is from Redlands, CA.

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DR. ERNEST WILLIAMSON III has published poetry and visual art in over 370 national and international online and print journals. Some of Dr. Williamson's visual art and/or poetry has been published in journals representing over 30 colleges and universities around the world. Visit Dr. Williamson's website: www.yessy.com/budicegenius

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THE SAND CANYON REVIEW

ARE YOU A WRITER, ARTIST, POET,
OR PHOTOGRAPHER?

Submit your work to The Sand Canyon Review

Name, address, phone number, email address, and a brief bio of the submitter must be attached to the submitted work.

Short stories are to be no more than ten pages in length, double-spaced.

Poetry is limited to 40 lines.

Artwork is limited to 3 entries per person. All images must be 300 dpi resolution or of a high resolution nature. Please include the medium and year the artwork was created.

All work must be original and unpublished. Submitter retains all rights to the work once published, if chosen.

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Work may also be submitted to Ryan Bartlett at Crafton Hills College (SSA Building) and must include a self-addressed envelope if work is to be returned.

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