

REVIEW

IU Southeast 2011

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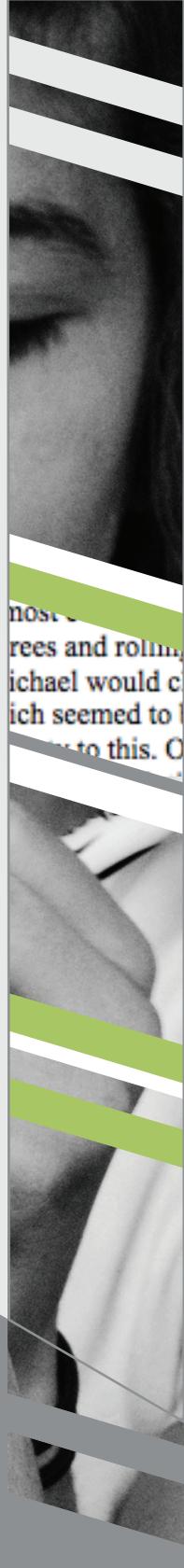
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THE IDEA OF A WOODEN BIRD

John Scott Brewer

You are
the idea of a wooden bird
meant for

 better things than
 these symbols and
 syllables can incant

left you wanting
the hint of a journey
 some old prophesy
 taste of foreign spices and
 muddy river banks where

a plot twist will surely
divide the reader base
fans and critics
 systematically
 she would try to please
 the world with

parenthetical citation over
enthused mimicry as
 she mines the furrows
 synaptic streambeds, panning
 for trilobites and the odd horn coral

Vestigial things from grade school
crawl
and unaware of their own
vast ageless, importance

But you
are the idea of a wooden bird
on the high ledge
 forever perch
 fingers spread wide
 anticipating the rush of air
 soundly defying insistent Newtons

Silent carpentry has
while you slept
caught your general suggestion and you

Can't name a hammer
or understand a simple paring knife
detailing your beak, etched
 dogwood feathers filigree their
 way across your back

Flightless; she will watch you
for hours before going back
 into the basement to
 try and again
capture the lines on your hands
in her wet primary colors

HALF EMPTY BOTTLES OF ANTI-RETROVIRAL PILLS

Chelsea Beville

are tipped over and spilled on the table.
His brother pulls back the blankets
to show us the drawn up legs and arms
every joint curled like a wilting flower
crushed by its own weight.

The dull white eyes
roll to watch me as we pray over him.
We turn to leave. His brother stops us,
points to my camera and asks in Tswana
“Will you take his face and tell his story?”
The shutter clicks.



CRANE HOUSE

Digital Photography
S.D. Lintz

A SON OF THE BOG DWELLERS

Jon Carson

A son of the bog dwellers
(marsh riven, rough twinelaced boots),
once removed to this dark and bloody ground

escaping famine. America.
Steel mills, forgers of iron, smelters – syncretic form;
the heat and flame and spark
that drives the engine,

so different from the peat glow
that burned sullen and humble
(mud daubed streamshaped stone)
in the altars of our hearths.

Hand-seated stone, lumpy grey and chalky stone,
fitted with care and propriety.
Practical, pragmatic stone,
each to each so no chinks did appear,
Finn and Sweeney singing in the eaves.
Distant, silent, filtering through the cracked stone
shackled with new words.

Commerce was our goal.

ARYAN EYES

Madison Cyr

When I was born I cried. Every baby does I guess, but I stopped when my father held me. At least that's what my mother told me. She also says I smiled at him even though babies that young can't smile. I don't remember any of this. I don't remember much before I was five. I guess that's normal too. What I'm getting at is that we started off right, my Dad and I. we went along that way, too, for a while.

I wanted to be like him, I remember that. I remember telling the cashier at the local supermarket that I wanted to be a fireman when I grew up, just like my dad. I remember looking at his muscular arms with awe. I thought he was a demi-god and that those arms could encircle the world as easily as they encircled me.

When I think back on these early memories I know that there must have been signs; a malicious glint in his eyes (eyes nearly identical to mine)—something to explain the ultimate outcome of our years together. But even when I recall incidents of violence and rage they seem isolated in my memory—flukes—occasions of bad things happening to good people. But these are the lies we harbor about those we love; that the ugliness inside is just an accessory to their essential self, not part of it.

*I have always been scared of *you*,
With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo.
And your neat mustache
And your Aryan eye, bright blue.
Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You---
-Sylvia Plath "Daddy"*

When did I start to feel afraid? Even after you pushed mother onto the ground where she banged up her head, I trusted you. And your Aryan eye, bright blue. Did you smoke then? You smoked quietly in secret. I blamed those little white sticks and later those little glass bottles—as if you were an impressionable youth and they your unsavory cohorts. Denial is survival.

No, I don't think it was until you yelled at me for some offhanded remark and took away the keys, the cards, the checks, my plans for new blouses....Now I'm sickened by the realization that I became afraid when you took something from me—the prospect of material things—but not when you banged up mother. But I know what a therapist would say; that the reality of the violence would've been too much for me to accept at such a young age, that the clothes incident was easier for me to comprehend and simpler to address, and therefore, easier to feel.

I stopped throwing away your cigarettes. I stopped caring if you lived or died.

Brute heart of a brute like you.

The fear didn't matter much. I still ran miles for you. Still ate for you. Still starved for you. Still stuck at my own flesh, cleaned rooms, judged, smiled, laughed, hated....

Our last family vacation we went to the Grand Canyon. Joking around, you pushed me close to the edge. When I looked at you I could see that you knew I thought it was no joke, but your eyes were amused. Cold, cold and playful.

On that same trip you bought mother an antique diamond ring, "Because I never bought you a formal engagement ring." And the night we got back home and an argument ensued less memorable than your final pronouncement,

"You can shove that ring up your ass."

That was in August of 2001. My first summer of sadness. The summer I anticipated death and got it. The summer my dad took off his clothes and became the accessory.

The years between September 11th and the first divorce are blurry. They were egocentric. My mother was concentrating on her pain and my father on his madness. Their days were full, as were mine. In the mornings I sat outside and thought until the dew dried, only until, to deter any predisposition to idleness (father was always criticizing mother for her idleness). And after this I ran. There wasn't a certain route, I ran until I felt sick, however long that took. When I got home I did

crunches. I remembered reading somewhere a quote by Kiera Knightley where she said that the only exercise she did was crunches because she could do them indefinitely while watching Oprah with little effort. She had a flat stomach so the advice seemed credible.

Bit my pretty red heart in two...

The first divorce coincided with my first professional play, *The Crucible*. The irony of that title was lost on me at the time. Now, when I look back I think the casting directors saw what I couldn't. I was cast as Betty Paris because I wouldn't even have to act the part; I just had to wear the costume.

That was also the fall my mother's best friend moved in with us and my dad moved out of the house and into the garage. It was also the fall my mother stopped concentrating on her pain and drove into the desert for a week. When she got back she slept with another man. A tall, rough looking man named John who sold chrysanthemums down the street out of a big red barn. I was the first person my mother told. I couldn't feel anything. I remember wondering whether they'd been together in the barn or not. For some reason that's what bothered me most, that she could let it happen in a barn, like an animal, like Abigail Williams, Abigail Williams and John the mum man, John Procter.

They filed after that. My mom smoked a joint in the car on the way to the courthouse. To this day I don't know if the joint was celebratory or tragic....

But they pulled me out of the sack,

And they stuck me together with glue....

I never told any of my cast members. They didn't find out until dress rehearsals when a girl asked me if my parents were coming opening night and I replied,

“Oh, I dunno. They're getting divorced right now so logistics are kind of tricky.”

This was what I'd been waiting for. You have to play your cards right if you want real pity. You have to be brave and mature, it has to seem like you're the master of your fate, that way when people find out that in reality you've been dealing with something heavy and awful they're both heartbroken and amazed at your strength. Pulling something like that off is harder than playing Betty Paris, I don't care what anyone says. I

spent the rest of the day feeling like a hero. The birth of a martyr....

I don't know what happened, but somehow they decided it was a mistake. They still loved each other, time to have another baby, right? My dad got his vasectomy reversed. This would've been winter of 2006. The next 6 months were heaven. It was like living in a creamcicle dream—the sky seemed to be made of crepe paper—translucent and mutable (I may be trying to say that even God seemed tangible. Under such circumstances, how can you tell?). To be honest I don't really know what happened. Why it came apart again. My mother couldn't get pregnant. Something about my dad's sperm being asleep. I know that's not right, but that's what I remember the reason being. All the life within him—the potential for life—was dormant. I guess they gave up and my dad started back up with his old cohorts (remember them? Little sticks and little bottles?) Anyway, that fall was the fall of the second divorce. My father made himself a smaller and smaller presence in our lives so that when we left, my mother and me, on Christmas day, I hardly thought of him.

And I said I do, I do.

So daddy, I'm finally through...

But the caveat I didn't foresee was that he thought of me. And often. Obsession bred like bacteria sending him into frenzy, septic shock. There comes a point when you think of a person so often that they cease to be a person. They become a feeling, and then a name, and then a sound, and when the sound is repeated enough, they become silence (because a constant, unchanging sound has always seemed to me to create a type of silence.) I was silence. Silence is easy to lie to, easy to manipulate, easy to bruise, easy to leave in halls of damp cement.

You got your silence back and remembered how much you love noise. Now it's just we two.

Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.

DOGWOOD BLOSSOM

Justin Levesque

There was a dogwood blossom on the side of the road.

The guiding star that I have used for the last three-hundred miles turned out to be a 747. My interests at the time included painting, singing, and harboring thoughts that may one day make it to paper and lay waste to humanity one syllable at a time. Always inhaling that cosmic energy and coughing up that bad poetry I'm so often privy to. I had been walking for days. Previously I had left Charlestown, headed north towards Carmel, appreciating the rolling lands and French-style homes of Indiana. There was an old barn I stopped by with an old man who could have been carved out of granite, but scared me with his breathing. Inside the barn he had a massive collection of odds and ends and things that rotated towards him over the years. I took a rucksack and gave him ten dollars, then made my way down the road. He spoke with that thousand-year-old slowness that demanded attention. He smiled and I smiled and we never saw each other again.

I made my way into the capital. Indianapolis. There were planes and buses exploding by and people yelling things in warbled ways that in centuries previous may have been mistaken for the invocation of witches. There was an old bookstore there; I would need something to read. I would need many somethings to read. Instead of texts, I got as many empty notebooks as I could find and filled them into my rucksack. Two shirts, pants, pens. There's a wool poncho, flint and a small knife, a compass hangs off the zipper, and a small first aid kit with the bare-essentials of a needle with thread, antiseptic and four bandages. I paid with my little roll of money; two-hundred dollars tucked in various places- fractions of it in my pocket, in my sock, under my foot in my shoe, in a hidden sewn-on compartment in my bag as well.

Leaving, I could hear the musings of an old woman. Not elderly, just older. She spoke of her favorite authors loudly to her friends and as a result to everyone around; she talked in epitaphs and mourning of Kerouac and Warhol and cried out loud to her love of the work of John Singer Sargent. Her acquaintance who lingered just on the fringe of the group told her to be quiet. She retaliated with a mockery of their clothing. It was nice leaving Indiana.

I traveled west. A bus whisked me away and I sat writing. Overexcited for my travel and the things to come of it. I had graduated high-school earlier as a result of finding out I could actually do that- I did everything I could to escape that abattoir as fast as I could, and I did. Writing an essay and submitting it to a college or some university, I managed to win a grant that helped fund this adventure. The adventure was on, I would have never imagined myself sitting here, writing feverishly into this moleskin while patrons stare at me as though I was their long-lost son. I am not your son. My only father is the world. My only mother is the sky. I will find myself.

I found myself in Illinois, near St. Louis, Missouri, and stopped sharply. The bus had reached its end, and I was to get off of here. The women and men filed off of the bus hand-in-hand or along; I was the second to last to get off of the bus, and out of the piss-ridden nooks and crannies that terminal iron wagon had in it. There was a woman behind me who looked lost, confused and worried- however strode in contradiction to her expression. She walked with purpose and poise, dignity and without the slightest inclination of regret. I both worried for, and envied this woman. We were at a bus-stop with dozens of rugged and sad vehicles idling in their aisles. It was just turning into the night, and I began walking northeast to Chicago. I would have to make my way through Bloomington; on the map I bought from the station before I left, I can see that series of roads leading into that landmark of a city goes right across a river before I hit Chicago. From there, who knows. This would set my pace, and it needed to go well.

There was an ill wind breathing here earlier. It blew about me as I walked and I felt the very shadow of death, or the silhouette of life circling me; as though to say "Do you really want this? Are you cut out for this? Do you need this? Do you deserve this? Will you preserve this? Who are you? Who will you be? Would the you of the now like the you of the then?" I knew nothing, and I still know nothing. I will never know anything to tell anyone about living their own life. I will be lost. I will be a fog that rolls under the sky- the cloud that sits beneath the clouds. Similar but separate from everything. This is how I saw myself, and I hated it. I hated how egoistic it sounded- how the only thing to describe how I really felt seemed to so many to be a cry for individuality, when contrarily it seems to me that the happiest people

are the ones that find people like them; there is nobody for me here though, I have no one. I do have Polaris though, and she's burning to the north, and north is where I'm going.

Before long I found myself in a clutch of towns in the southern area of Illinois, specifically in Clinton County. There was an old time-forgotten place called St. Rose, and it was one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen. There were old-style handmade homes contesting the tests of time. Children rode by on their bicycles and people washed their cars in their driveways. Though none of this was going on now. The night was deadening. I saw bikes laying in the grass, I saw buckets sitting next to tires of cars. I heard the moaning of the houses sighing across the lanes. I could hear the screaming of the television sets keeping the company of the haphazard insomniacs who have joined me at this witching hour. This is a good place. Don't forget this place.

Directly to the east of St. Rose, there is a river, and then a second river, and eventually you will find Carlyle Lake. A humbling mass of droplets that sits incredibly silent. Impressively quiet. I heard a lonesome frog on the far end opposite of the bay. The moon was overhead, and bore a sister of a reflection on the rockpools, leading into the trembling waters ahead. Cat-tails and lake reeds filled my nose. I will camp here tonight, this is a realm forgotten by time. My rucksack makes for a good pillow, and my poncho makes for a good blanket. There are stars above staring at me, into my soul. There are times when I can feel the rumbling of atoms in my blood, in my veins, in my arm, on my body, in these clothes, on this bay, in this county, in this country on this planet. I can feel it all rumbling and encroaching. A big something encroaching. Unfortunately I was not on the cusp of an enlightening thought, but actually hearing the approach of a police car with their lights aimed right at me, brows a-furled. Fantastic.

Things went better than expected. Apparently they were having issues with frisky frolickers fondling in the fields up there, and I suppose they've had enough of a population boom (I didn't ask why they were trying to stop it, I just figured that copulation led to population) and were trying to put a stop to it. Never mind the fact that I was someone out of nowhere appearing in their town in the middle of the night. After a bit of essential questioning they let me on my way, telling me to stay out of trouble. I managed an "Oh, ah. Okay. Goodbye." I was surprised at my voice. He saw so and made a face that looked like he

received an ugly tie. I appreciate your effort, officer.

I went back to the bay, and rested until morning. Making my way still north I cut through the sidewalks and roads headed north. There was an old diner there, too. They had the best pie in the world, I swear. My spirit was brought into tears, and the waitress' name was Goodie. Goodie. After a back and forth I told her about my plans and my lack of them, really. She wholeheartedly endorsed the idea, and made it a point to tell me that the spirit of adventure has, for-sure, left our country. She said to me,

“Boy lemme tell you. People used to be able to borrow a cuppa sugar, y’know? People used to be able to have their kids have fun in the streets. Sprinklers, whatnot. We ain’t got that anymore. What we’ve got is a nation of pacifiers. Binkies. Things you put in babies’ mouths when they cry, y’know? People’d been coddled and taught that a scrape on a knee ain’t a scrape on the knee, but the end of the god-damn world.”

I sat there with the taste of blueberries in my mouth, “Binkies...” escaped my lips.

Leaving the diner, Goodie said her goodbyes and told me to wait outside for a bit, which I did. If I’m guilty of anything in my life it’s my undying ability to listen to happenstance commands. She came out with a bag. My first thought was drugs. Turned out to actually be a sandwich and I felt a bit better about the world and the people in it. I took her bag and hugged her, which seemed to be a bit of a surprise but a welcome one. After a bit I left and returned to the road. North.

Bloomington finally. My legs are so tired, and this city is so excited. I feel like the wet blanket of a fire party that’d go for years and years. I bitterly ignore the hotel to my left, as the car that carried me soared passed. Earlier, as I was walking from St. Rose, a nice Cadillac had pulled next to me with an older couple on the inside. They both had stretches around their corners of their eyes; names Nick and Shara. They asked,

“Wh’tsa kidlike you doin’ walkin’?” The husband asked that, but the same exact question was implied in the wife’s eyes.

“I don’t really know. I’d get tired of running all the time, and all it seems to get to walking is to just lean forward.”

“Well wh’s that?” he rifled back at me

“Well if you don’t start walkin’ you’ll bust your face.” He laughed, I laughed nervously and his wife was made of knives and coal,

but I could feel a faint sincerity come off of her hair-product.

I began to wonder if Herbal Essences finally breached the fourth wall and began placing in their products emotions rather than chemicals, when he offered me a brief ride. I told them I was headed towards Bloomington, and as it turned out that's where they were headed to. A daughter of theirs had recently gone off to college and was going to deliver the last of her things up to her dormitory, as well as deliver their goodbyes before she's buried under books and busybodied worksheets. I felt at ease, and put my bag into their car as the wife said only this during the entire car trip:

"I don't want her going up there to that school. D'y'know how many people are attacked on campuses each year?"

"Binkies." I whispered into the corner of my mouth.

The infinite sorrow of the over analytical mind. I am so tired of being this. I was told once that you will never cross the ocean if you're too scared to lose sight of the shore. I pressed on in Bloomington; the heralding city. The elderly couple's car sped off to the university and I took my time; there were many smoke-filled holes in the street full of people and stories, I was faced with no other option. I could see people filing in and out of diners arm in arm, lovestruck faces going to heart-filled places. This was a nice place; the police seeming to keep their ear open for the music of the half-suppressed scream. I saw a man sitting on a bench with a cane; there were many explanations for this. He could have been blind- novelty canes with red tips with white lengths may be more expensive then I am led to believe. He could also be a veteran, since his eyes are not covered by blocker-sunglasses nor do his irises wander in dark amazement at the sounds around him. Deciding he was indeed, crippled and patient, I made my way down the street before me.

Cars wailed their horns and people yelled out their windows at each other in the midst of traffic. Their exhaust plugged the air and their words made it not only smelly, but also sad. I can hardly keep track of the times humans have proven themselves to be entirely inhuman to each other. Through threats of violence or abandonment or dissolution of their things. I have spoken with very many people in my time, and each time those people've opened up, they apologized. Each moment a human is entirely human and voicing their problems, their concerns and their feelings, they retract and say they're sorry. Apologizing for those sparse moments when humans are entirely human; refusing to

apologize at all- merely accepting their punishment- when humans are, indeed inhuman. I can hardly believe how far we've gotten from ourselves. How, most often, the things that can warm the cockles of even the coldest heart are not warm embraces or thoughts, but parasites that have decided to live in the Aorta and ultimately be killed with pills. I came across a bookstore and quickly swept myself inside into an aura of candles.

Many patrons grazed the shelves of this place, and not a single one flinched as my pack completed its entry into the doorway. The owner was an aging woman who looked as though she were constantly worried about something, even while smiling to greet her customers, accept orders, discuss politics, or work the cash register. The result of this was her making an in-between smile that consisted of the inward-curvature of her eyebrows met with a welcoming flourish of teeth and lips. She was a very confusing woman.

The rug of this place was crimson- running all over, under, up and down the alleys of books, and if someone were from the past, they may have believed this establishment to have been suspect to a massive murder scene. Vanilla incense smoldered in the far corner, but blanketed the ceiling in spite of its distance. Each book was a relic. There were no laminated covers nor gloss, no special fonts from a computer. They were all from another time. They all smelled as though they graced the very fringe of what "Is" and what "Should be"; making me long and grow nostalgic for a time I was never a part of.

I remained here for the duration of the store's hours. I was not about to abandon this hostel of knowledge, but as things go, I was asked to leave by the confusing woman in a very snowflake fashion. Coming on strong and cold with her demand, but quickly letting that demeanor melt away and you would have never guessed it was cold in the first place. It was incredibly dark outside, and clouds skewed the view. Most of the cars had left for their homes aside from the few dozen or so haphazard teenagers taking their newfound freedom for a test-run. Understandable, nameless children, burn your candles bright.

I was jostled awake on a park bench. Not by prodding or shoving, but by sheer force of gravity. A heavyset man decided he were tired, and I happened to have gone to sleep sitting up, as though I were some sort of horse- there was room for him to plant. And plant he did, as I collected my things and regained my composure from the sputtering



GLASS HOUSE PLANTER 2011

Digital Photography
S.D. Lintz

mess I've made on the ground. His stare was lugubrious and slow. I then began to wonder how exactly a stare could be a slow one, but for this moment, I was staring into the paradigm of what a slow-stare would be, is currently, and will be for as long as I assume that person is still alive. I regret never asking his name.

Northwest. If I am in Bloomington, Northwest would be my best option. I have accomplices living in Chicago and it's always been a thought to head up there and see what there is to see and smell what there is to smell, as horrible as it may be. I can hopefully steal their couch for a few nights or a long while at least. Perhaps learn some things about life as, maybe even a job for a bit if the powers that be are so inclined to grant that. There are no buses the way I'm going. There is a dirt road and my compass reads as a bullet towards the Northwest. I can see the cloud of a car travelling away from me in the distance; it should be safe to say that this road is travelled, and if I am killed or bitten or made to die, at least eventually somebody will hit my body with a car.

I have been walking a long while now, very long indeed. A stranger stopped and let me hop into the cab of his truck for a few miles before stopping and telling me to get out. I had never been so nervous in my life. The man and I never exchanged names, but I have the feeling with the look in his eye that I exchanged my soul for an easy way to get an extra few miles under my belt without having to walk. An incredible uneasiness washes over me, and yet, is washed from me. Although the harrowing devil has driven away and become a cloud, I was another mile from a great river. I believe this river would lead into Michigan if I floated down it as a bag would, but unfortunately Michigan is not my destination right now. The clouds have moved on, and there is a reverberating silence. Sometimes as I'm beneath this moon, I feel a sovereignty that may only be bestowed by way of a sublime and ancient process undertaken by those whose Modus Operandi was merely to lose themselves. There is a spider next to me on a log in the light. Its arms are down, and fangs are retracted. It moves not an inch, and neither do I. In the society of a nuclear-family's house, this spider would be villain enough for the both of us, and I feel an overwhelming sadness. I still cannot remember if I merely thought this, or actually spoke, but my torso and head turned towards my ally:
"Sleep well, eight-legs."

I stirred out of my dream; a faint vision of a hedgerow being torn out of the ground lived in my mind. The sun was beaming and I checked around a bit of a feverish manner for my spidery companion. Nowhere to be found, I investigated myself for any bite marks. Shortly afterwards I felt regret for not trusting the unknown. A ways more down the road a truck that had lettuce in the back offered me a ride down farther; I accepted and sat within the heads of leaves while we bustled down the road and the driver snapped his fingers to the terrible rhythms coming from the radio. The announcer was going on about a kind of skin cream that would make wrinkles disappear; all I could think about was a girl who pressured her parents into purchasing a face cream; which quickly started an allergic reaction after its application, sending her face into an array of horror and agony as the doctors inevitably had to peel her face off the bone like that of an orange. It had been a while since I had drunk orange juice, and that trend was now bound to continue strong. The truck jumped a little and a head of cabbage fell out. I hope a grasshopper finds it; maybe the spider will eat the hopper.

The truck is leaving now. He had taken me quite a ways along weary lanes of tall-grass that smelled like a lawn forgotten; it was a bit tense saying goodbye, I had nothing to give the man in return for this, and he stared at me as though I were to present my transitional tax. I gave him all the change I had in my pocket after I bought the pie Goodie gave me. Giving a snort and rolling his window (well as his eyes), he sped off to wherever he was headed to. As his dust cloud traveled, I yelled at him through the wind:

“I hope you never get that lettuce back! Spiders need grasshoppers!”

There were two rivers running to my sides, which were relatively unnoticeable with the combined efforts of my inauspicious ways of missing landmarks, and they were pretty far apart. However, they seemed to form into one river, and I remembered that Chicago was surrounded pretty well by water on many fronts, so the confidence in my direction skyrocketed. There was a group of young men standing or thinking or digging next to the leftmost river, and I observed for a bit before waving my arm at them. They looked around a bit, and I was confused too. Soon however, it dawned on me that the way I was

waving was most often used when people were trying to warn other people to get out of the way of something that would most definitely kill them. In lieu of there being no waterborne freight trains headed towards them, I introduced myself to the group.

There were three of them, none of whom I never learned the names of; however, they definitely know a deal about me- nothing incriminating or distinguishable, mainly the essential elements for crafting a friend; favorite movie, color, baseball team, holiday. While I answered their questions with half a heart, I began to think about them. There was a taller one, he had dark brown hair and a searing farmer's tan- white shirt with dark blue jeans with a pair of black Chuck Taylors made into low-cut shoes. He had a scar on his left arm that I didn't ask about, but assumed it was from rescuing one of his siblings, who I considered to be one or both of the younger and shorter of the group. He clearly looked dissatisfied even being there, and lit up a bit when I was waving at them like a lunatic.

The two younger kids looked pretty similar to the older one, their cheekbones were very different- this entire group appeared to be very gaunt and tanned, but the faces of these two were more angular. One was blonde, and the other had a brighter haircut than the larger one. They both had freckles and were terribly shy of kids, which was pretty understandable given the encounter. They quickly opened up and were exponentially nice when the realization that I was, indeed, not an axe-wielding murder, finally sunk in. We talked about fighter jets and airplanes for what I would think to be hours.

What they were doing by the water was actually the weaving of boats out of the cat-tail reeds growing. By the time I had reached this place, the sun had grown into an amber rose and was headlong into the horizon; the kids inevitably had to leave. The older one kept staring at me as the younger kids were gathering their things together- as though he quietly understood what I was doing. With a "Goodbye, get home safely!" they left as soon as they appeared in my life. Before completely leaving however, the oldest gave me his lighter. He held it as though he were holding a nuclear device or maybe a bird that had fallen out of its nest. I could see in the lines of his face that this was an incredible moment for him. I accepted his gift, and they disappeared into the quickly flickering day.

It was late, and the moon finally made an appearance so I could sparsely see my surroundings. The lighter in my palm felt heavy; a heaviness that far exceeded the accelerant inside of it. I hadn't been in a full conversation in an incredibly long time, and those kids fulfilled that for me. I can't help but wonder if they'll ever realize how much importance of that seemingly meaningless exchange had for me. After the sound of their shoes crushing the tall grass faded away, a crushing silence fell over the field. The water seemed muted, the fauna turned mime, and I became suddenly aware of how alone I was. I reached into my rucksack and pulled out a journal, which I promptly amputated ten paper pages from, and spent the remainder of the night sewing boats out of the reeds in the river. Eventually, I had ten sea-worthy vessels. I wrote into each piece of paper a message of good will to a person; Goodie and her pies, Nick, Shara, their daughter in Bloomington, the harrowing stranger how led me to the spider, the spider itself, the three kids who are now short a suspected-to-be contraband lighter, and even the lettuce guy. I tore a piece of cotton from my shirt and divided it into tenths, gingerly placing each one into a now-crumpled paper, and that paper into a boat. My thumb gripped against the spark wheel, which shot fire across the fork, and ignited the fumes released by the jet, the jet-spring, and regulated by the valve; before I knew it, the kid's lighter was now an artificial sun above my thumbnail. Each tuft of cotton took the ember nicely, and I sent the messages along down the wire of the river, which slowly took them away from me. I did my best to stay turned around for the rest of the night, so I wouldn't be able to see any of my messages overturn in the wake. Inevitably, one of them capsized, revealing the burning message slowly sinking to the floor:

“I hope you find more lettuce.”

MY SOMETIMES FRIEND

Benjamin Traugher

when my sometimes
friend mr. barbour was
little older kids sang and
made fun calling him

little barbour barbershop
now he's all
grown and thinks that
i'm afraid

of what, i
can't say
but that's
not true exactly

once, we killed
a few bottles and
he threw up green
spaghetti in the

valu-market parking
lot i pulled him
home when the
stars began to close

in round his head
before he passed
out completely
a slurred out whisper

said to remind him
of a secret he had to tell me

not now, but tomorrow
remember not to forget

waking life left him lying
beside some magic marker drawings
giant dicks and women's asses
scattered all around his body

morning came and left
his memory vacant
i reminded him of
his enigma

he laughed but could
not remember
he said vaguely
recalling thinking

that i shouldn't be afraid
of what, he couldn't say
but that's
not true, exactly



DY

Painting
Dylan Shipe

PLANTING SEASON, 1894

Jon Carson

He has neither hoe nor pick nor plow. A shovel, thrice-used, stands plunged into the earth across the field, catching dwindling light and revealing only rusting shadow as it lengthens and fades into the murky and gathering dark. It is a disused corner of plot, uphill, overgrown and barren. Weeds rise from parched soil ill-conceived. Small life unfit to these elements, wilting lesser few, knotted amongst vines that trellis from the forest line; a netted cowl that palls cold turned earth. His back turned to its specter, he cannot remember; those vines like hair once, sun-dappled. Rose blossomed tresses. Ophelia. The years have not diminished.

There is much to be done. Planting season soon. Earth. Only welcomes what we cannot want. What we cannot part.

Hands claw through graveled soil, bent, growing crooked, scabbed with white age. Rocky outshoots like the stones he has displaced. He cannot remember; he turns soil with ragged finger, with palm and cracked nail. He has pled before, bent his brow against the turning of the wind with ravaged and blood-stricken eyes. Naught, these failed gods. He can only do, he must: take earth in hand and tear through its roots, defile its dark recesses. He tells himself it is preparation. Planting season. It is but any other.

This earth is lifeless, its surface a sheen of dust. Only by turning can soft earth be found. Red, moist, fertile—beating against the pulsing of his veins. Life force against life force. One must be destroyed. Balance. Hard scrapple plot of land, no larger than the lawn leading to a mausoleum.

Fingers snag upon obstinate root. He proceeds. Force against force. Nail peeling from fingertip, blood rushing its crescent moon. He falls back, defeated, unleashing foreign epithets against dwindling light. They sound of caves, of club: old fears. All that lay beyond the flickering fire before religion was born. Sleek predators of unknown form. Lithe movement in inky depths.

Shadows among shadows. Cold like stone. The cry of a hawk piercing the night.

He rises, blood the only fluid this land will allow. Last effusion in his empty form, stuffed as with straw and parched like old bone picked clean by scavengers.

He appears to exude dust from pores, sweat dry like scorched earth. Afterwards, he wanted to walk this muddy Earth, seep its soil dry—bent and bound to his dry marrow. But he has diminished. He is part of this forsaken landscape; he bears it like deteriorating clothing, arrayed as if vanquished in conflict, yet damned to its desolate colors.

Upon the hill where the soil was good, he buried two of his children stillborn, and finally a third, still lodged in the cooling corpse of his wife. He has pled before. When the soil was good.

He stands and looks away, failing not to remember. A stark and desiccated silhouette obtruding upon the thin meridian of the sun wasting beyond the distant horizon; a failed horseman scanning his skyline. The years have not diminished.

WHEN SHE FILLED THE JAR

Chelsea Beville

full of lightning bugs, having remembered to carefully tap a nail through the lid to puncture the airways, she had no thought of what sort of society she was forming.

What she did not know—and what may be considered pertinent information—is that when two or more are gathered under the name of Ball, they begin to perspicate.

In her room that night, the bugs in the jar, casting overlapping waves of yellow glow on the wall, began to speak to one another.

The first said *There must be a Creator who made this jar so beautifully for us to enjoy.* The others replied *There must.*

The first became the leader and commanded *There must be a way to honor the Creator of this providential jar, who brought us all together and gave us the power to speak.* The others replied *There must.*

So they formed a circle, glowers in the center, and by the combined power of their luminating bodies produced a small, holy shrine.

The leader became the priest and prophesied *There must be a sacrifice to bring joy to the Creator so that the Creator continues to provide for us, and does not smite us and send us from this beautiful home.* The others replied *There must.*

So they held a competition and whoever's glower glowed the brightest was reasoned the most honorable choice, and his wings were plucked and as he dropped down to the bottom of the jar, his last dimmed words were *There must—*

And because the priest had prophesied, and they could not tell that the Creator had been enjoyed enough to provide more for them, they continued to sacrifice the brightest, each dimly crying *There must—* until the priest himself took the lights of his last disciple and alone, unable to speak, thought *There must have been another way* and plucked his own wings and fell.

And when she awoke in the warm yellow morning she found her jar of lightning bugs extinguished and she whispered *There must be a reason they died. I'll add grass tonight.*

A CONVERSATION ONE AFTERNOON, FOLLOWING A HAIRCUT

Jon Carson

Homer Wells is screaming across the river. Good night and Good night and Good night. Petty pace. Dim candles lit from poor substance. Form poor substance. Substitute for subsistence. The sere sustenance of famine. Distended like bellies. Riverrun words of...polluted river? Exhaustion and exasperation. Riverrun.

Hear him moving in the next room, rousing from those daytime naps he hates to take. They remind him. He always wakes sighing, thick and empty air. Broadcasting his sorrow as he unscrews the cap from the clouded-plastic two liter of root beer and pours its stale remnant across the melting ice: the sadness of such isolated acts. Lonely deeds, wilted and flat.

Root beer does not go stale quickly. It is a slow process only recognized in its aftermath, each exuberant bubble escaping the capped rim, working its ponderous way through the threaded lip into the stagnant air. And dissipation.

What clouds this plastic? The bubbles? Their dying effervescence as they escape that ill-hewn chemical form? Diligent little labyrinthine wonders, striding forward through the cycled threads, rising dust in their wake. Their negated void. Allows the dust in: through the bulk of their absence. Calcium deposits. Visible degradations of age. Vessel so poorly sealed. Relents to reason. All things must.

Set the Irving aside. Study not possible, now that he's up. Been like this since...but since before. Be fair. Running a hand across the back of the neck, the pebbled surface. More of them every day. Out damn warts. More of them. Only ones left with the will to live. How they break from this fleshy form that begot them and ascend towards a light. Any light. Miscast flowers. Cancerous tubers ripe for reaping. Whose scythe? Whose harvest?

It could be cancer. One more worry. Those wild pigs without natural predators. Die young, stress-induced ulcers. Traditional view. They now conjecture it could be a bacteria, eating through their stomach linings and hemorrhaging blood where it does not belong. Flowers of effusion, blooming in perverse unwanted splendor. Cancer devouring cells. Life against life. One may win. Our dying earth. Malignant. Such a human word, so rife with purpose. Perhaps to ease it, make them mortal too. The old joke. Is it benign? Oh, b'nine, b'nine and a half. Ill suited to nature.

Every character must have the capacity to act. Passive characters create stale fiction. Like old root beer.

He fell on the porch the other morning. Woke me: The shattered "Oomph" escaping his lips. Concussive, felt it through the walls. Cane as it clattered against the glass door. Rose quickly, fearing the worst. Stumbling through the dark. Always stumbling. Opening the door with dread. Frail old

form, a grey and beaten man, lying across the icy steps, inglorious. Unable to hide. Broken body will no longer allow it. Cold and icy nature.

Helped him up, hands tucked under loose armpits. Cotton dust of his wrinkled shirt; dry musk faded by age and frozen in scentless particles. Bristled chin. Slate eyes twisting and mocked; torsion, caged in stasis. Boundaries of the body. Modality. Moments are frozen like this, motionless...or petrified.

Latent and disused muscles. Can bear any burden. Except this. The resignation, pleading against me as I helped him to his feet. Does not want my help. Yet no. Other option. Cane perched edge of the concrete, tilted upon the frozen and dark earth, frosted metal, resigned to descent. Took it by the cracked rubber tip, brushing caked dirt from duct-taped handle, slipped it into his palm. Casual air that neither of us believed. Nothing normal.

“You know, you’re still strong Jon,” as I led him inside and to his chair.

“Of course, it was all those steps you used to make me run. Still there somewhere.”

He carried me once. In his youthful arms.

More than once. So long ago. But it is not there. Discarded infant memory. If the choice were ours, it would linger. So that it may last. In the present. But it does not. Once, though.

Texas. Sweltering. Sweat chafing cotton. Red boots blistering the heel. The forest trail; seemed to swell up monstrous before my child’s eyes, endless. Lumbering up out of some nightmare. The bogey beasts who cause children terror until that terror finds voice, wailing for parents to save us from the fathomless dark of night. Holding us in their arms and cooing until we drift to sleep, unaware the darkness is still there, still ever present around us. Resignation of children who cannot go on. He picked me up then, carried me sitting upon his shoulders, swaying, the heat as it rose from his neck and distorted the air. Proud. *Swinging dada’s back. Hands to hold my feetsie’s safe.* He could hike for miles like that, carrying me along.

“It’s just this goddamned knee, Jon. The chair out there, the metal,” icy as the icy air, “it slid out from under me when I was getting up the step. If it wasn’t for that, I’d be fine.”

If it wasn’t for that. He still thinks excuses are necessary. Achingly human condition.

Fragile and mortal pride. Undone. Neither of us believe.

He had a knee replaced last winter. That is the terminology, replaced. They saw out all the old and broken bones ground down to stubs, the arthritic spurs, and fuse new-forged titanium to the remaining bone and muscle and ligature. Metal is not a human word. Neither is hinge. Profane hybrids.

Necessary another inhuman word. I saw the x-rays that led to his surgery. Drove him to the appointment in case he had to be drugged-up. Waiting area, pretending to read some gloss of words and infotainment. Nurse approached, asked me to come with her. I feared the worst, again.

“Do you see that Jonathan, how the bones rest against each other?” doctor asking as he points to the illuminated screen. “He’s already lost about an inch and a half of bone matter.” I nod, not knowing. “There’s no cartilage left. The left knee is in the worst condition, but the right one is not much better.”

“What is that, there,” I ask, pointing to flaky horns jutting from the sides of the stark greenish-tinged expanse of bone upon the picture.

“Those are spurs. The bone is breaking apart. I’m surprised he’s gone this long without having it attended to.”

He was almost proud, sitting there on the table, smiling. He wanted me to see this, to see the pain he could endure, as if seeking my approval. My father. Proud. Almost. The pain he could endure.

My father, sitting on the gurney before surgery: It struck me. The dangers. His drowsy drugged smile (*Surgery does not kill. More often than not, it is the anesthesia: human error*) as he asked me not to worry, his concern for me. I touched his hand, (*I touched his father’s hand, resting across his stomach in the casket. I thought of fiberglass*) watched them wheel him away. First tears, nausea.

I held them back until he was out of sight.

But that was last winter. He was scheduled to have the other knee replaced, but he gained too much weight. He has been gaining weight since.... Powerless to stop it. I am. He. We are all impotent to thee, in our fashion. Your fashion. Miscast.

Passive characters create....Interesting is subjective. So is tragedy, moving through dooms. Was that celebratory or elegiac? Correction. Is that celebratory or elegiac? Fiction. Told it lives in the eternal present. Hard to swallow, that living part. Fiction is not capable of cancer, it requires no titanium. To say that fiction lives is another inhuman convention, another profane hybrid. We are the eternal present, the eternal lost and losing moment. Fiction. Measured in word counts, not years. The page cannot breathe, nor I for it. Nor can it forfeit. Nor I forfeit. Until. Yet until.

This damnable curse. If it lessens its choking grip for even an instant, we call it grace, blessing, because we lack the other words. Think those will suffice. Enough baggage there. Capacity for connotation.

Am not seeking to defy genres. Just incapable of conciliation. Synthesis dismissive of flux is not truth. Interesting is. Subjective.

Banquo’s ghost drove men mad. Hamlet’s father’s ghost drove that son to (contemplate) action. What if he had been a living ghost?

Pincher Martin never knew he was dead. Would the difference be that negligible? Outside of fiction? From without. Without fiction. Would the difference be? What clouds the plastic?

Should go and sit with him, finish this work later in the night. Not quite so fathomless anymore. Opposite. The dim room, pale light trailing in between the open blinds. Cloudy out. He does not like to have the light on, hates these new fluorescents. Claims the light is different, yellow. He will not close the

blinds. I cannot bear to have them open. A constant struggle.

It works like this, the tension, always. I waste the productive hours, sitting adjacent to him, feeling the pull of wood as it works its way through the thinning fabric of the chair. Already pulling apart at the seams where the arm reaches the rest. Can see within. The tarnished innards lying (belying) below its decorous surface. Cheap fabric, cheap wood, held with thick staples, industrial glue. Made to linger, not to last. Altogether (all too) fitting. Destined for landfills, dumps, trash heaps. Mingled with the decomposing rot that fell before. The garbage left by other people's lives, their lives...like detritus. Flesh fades, reveals its innards too. We fear nudity, and then we are dead. To the world, the global heap.

"How are ya doing, pops?" Standard refrain. The pattern. If we could only speak the truth. Such questions would not be asked. Silences, omissions. Necessary to continue.

"Listen, if you have work to do, I won't be a bother. I can go upstairs... don't want to be a bother."

"No, it's okay. I've been working for a few hours anyway. I could use a break." Thought of him, grinding up those old stairs, for my benefit. Rising like a bent and broken Ezekiel. Would his prophecies have been the same, had he ascended with broken knee and titanium? With his life cast like that below? Mad and violent men tell us our future. So rarely are they broken. Benefits of obscurity I guess. Every angel's terrifying.

"How is it going, your writing?"

"Not writing right now, just reading. Notes, meaning, all that fun stuff." Writing right now. Should be righting wrongs. Too many to catalog. White whales...others, obvious targets. We sit in silence. Nothing to say.

"You know, you don't have to sit in here with me. I know you've got work to do. You shouldn't be...sitting here with an old man...make you old before your time, that's not right."

"I'm not that young."

"Yes you are. I'm old," Cane catching the light, flickering instant, weak sun stabbing through a fracture in the cloud, breaking the boundary of the slats. "This old body of mine just doesn't want to...Funny how the mind can stay young while the body goes....It's when both feel old that you have problems."

"Yea, well..." Can't tell him. Some truths better left unsaid.

"Did I ever tell you about old Jimmy Glunck?"

"Uh-uh." Heard it. All before. Better left. Unsaid.

"Well he used to play in the band, with Chick in Huntingburg." *Touched his arm. Fiberglass.* "God that must've been..." hush of breath, "fif - sixty years ago." Eyes. Torsion. Stasis. "They couldn't get him to stop drinking, had to kick him out eventually. I mean, he looked like it, a drunk, the red nose, cheeks, everything. I remember one time, he was the one" *Broke your drum.* "that...Are



MEMENTO

Painting
Rebeka Trapp

you sure I've never told you this before?"

"Not that I can recall." Little lies. Human. Unsaid.

"Well, Chick had him over one night, and they were playing and talking and old Fatty, that's what they called him, Fatty Glunck, got to drinking—used to always carry a pint in his back pocket—and he decides he wants to sit down, so he goes and sits on my snare drum. Wouldn't you know, he broke right through it." *Wouldn't you know.* "I swear, you never heard such a ruckus. Ardella was screaming at Chick 'Why'd you let him start drinking in the first place?' telling him to get all those drunks out of the house. God, he was so embarrassed, he kept telling me he'd get it fixed, but he never did.... I never got another drum." Voice growing softer. Deepening distance. Nostalgia and loss, spent, mired in irrational conflagrations, conciliations. The mind. Fused to the immediate. Discordant juxtapositions. Memory and Remembrance. Things past. Lost time. Regained as regret. Man and his place. Here. Now. Things that damn him. Herethen. Therenow. "Few years later, I was drinking with him. He used to hang out with us kids, the heavy drinkers among us anyway. I guess the adults all got tired of his drinking, Anyway, one time—" Voice stronger now. Familiar territory. Telling stories I've heard before. Of drunks, small-town exuberances. Mind not so young as he feels. Old dusty stories. From before. Back when.... Back when he was whole. Been talking. Lost track. "well he threw that dynamite into the lake. Damn near blew off the whole dock. That was the last he got to hang out with us, cops was called on that one. Guess he couldn't promise to fix that one." Promises broken. Happens daily. Promise lost, potential. Just spirals away. One brief exploding moment, maelstrom, currents, and then nothing. Dead fish floating in the water; unable to comprehend the violence or force that brought them there. Immediately preceding. Always. Leading to the moment.

His cell phone ringing, dashing his revelry. The past stays. But only there. He tries to read the numbers on the screen. Takes him longer now, must pull out glasses. He pushes a button on the side of the phone, silencing the stock ring programmed into its cheap plastic circuits at a foreign factory. Designed to be melodically unobtrusive, calming. Siren, portending danger. I don't need to ask. Collectors. 1st mortgage. Now we must differentiate. Between 1st and 2nd. Maybe a 3rd I'm not aware of. All just numbers when signed away. Post-war. The boom, boon. His old dusty stories. When did these 2nd's come into play? What conjured their form into this life? Bubble, bubble. All can be postponed. Until tomorrow. And tomorrow and tomorrow. Mine. First generation with a lower standard of living than our parents. He's beating me to the punch. Lower already. Down to my (proposed) level. Spirals. We become and we become and we become. Our fathers and our sons.

"Nobody. Where was I?"

"Fatty Glunck."

"Oh yeah, Fatty. Yep, that was the last old Fatty got to hang out with us

kids.”

“Hey, you didn’t even notice my haircut.”

“Oh yeah,” leaning forward in his chair through the dim light, “hey, it looks real nice.”

I made sure to mention his haircut last week. Told him it looked professional. Thought it might help. Since being fired. July. Small mercies. Pity disguised. Should have retired by now. Unable. Bills. Heralds of past excess. Fistfulls of the American Dream. Fistfulls of fiction. Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. Like the haircut, just following in his footsteps. We become. Our fathers and our sons.

Always leave the stylist (*Stylist, when once was barber*) with a sense of unaccountable loss. Hair scattered upon the floor, so casually dismissed. What of it? Watch them fall, silent. Pity and sadness. Each lock. Crest. Fallen.

The sharp shock of scissors scraping the flesh behind the ear. Scrotum, stomach tightening. Should warn customers first, before. Make it easier to stomach; prepared for it, prior to.

Inhuman to dismiss in such a way. They are part, never truly growing, but expanding in death. Would we all. The necessity of rite. Something not to dwell upon. Must make it easier. Necessary opiate. Dulls the pain that cannot counteract dying. Act itself a living word. It must negate itself. The counter to act, that living word. The void demands its commensurate weight, displaced mass, buoyancy. So that those scales can remain balanced. However. Falsely. Illusion of order.

Checking his watch—Time to leave yet? I have work to do, miles to go before sleep. I cannot ask him to leave nor can I leave. Must be his decision. A sacrifice for me. Waiting in the cold car for her to leave the office. No Penelope. He’s home. She’s never returned. Never left, just bereft. Says the cold always makes his legs stiff. Must be true, even with the metal. Does the metal get colder, even with the flesh that surrounds it? The beating blood, coursing round the hinges and plates; do they give it warmth? Make it worthy of pronoun? Never. Be not proud.

The cold car. Newly bought, a source of shame and pride. Convoluted binaries of hope and failure. He used to always lease them. Brand new car every two years he would say. All those payments, accruing each and endless years, cycles of two. Nothing to show for it. Empty hands. Things that seem real, steel and chrome and piston. He drove them as if they were his. Felt them, the gas and blood mingled as one. To be forfeited at termination of lease, extra penalty for excess mileage. All that seemed real, that seemed to be his. Returned at end of lease. Steel and chrome and piston. Fiberglass.

He learned. Had to. As the eighties became the nineties. Transition to purchase. Financing. This new car, long and layered. Higher payments than the ones he cannot afford now. Bought it across the river. Had to, he said, the only place that would deal with me. Know it as truth. Wasn’t his first try, driving

that failing overdriven van to the local dealers. As each day waned, waiting for his homecoming, pleading with the nothing above that he return with a new car, new used car, anything, just so that he may retain some semblance of hope, however stilted, some degree of burnished dignity. The nothing above. Just to have my opinion heard. Only place that would deal. Long and sleek and layered. It resembles a hearse. He does not seem to notice.

“I hate this weather.”

“You’re the one that left California.”

“I wanted to be near Chick and Ardella, in case...I never thought they’d live that long.” Laughing, displacing dust hung stilted in the air.

“You could’ve had them move out there.”

“Ardella? Chick maybe, but Ardella was afraid to leave the house. I mean, think about it, she never even had a driver’s license. That town was all she knew. She would’ve never left.” *Did leave, eventually.* Nursing home, talking to his ghost across the table, asking where his paper was. Those thick plastic serving trays that smelled of formaldehyde, disinfectant; food that looked already chewed and spitten back onto the plate, partitioned into convenient compartments—predetermined size—entrée, side, dessert. An apple if your teeth are up to it. Otherwise, applesauce. “Besides, I wanted to be close to Emily and Sarah.” *Step sisters.* “It was important they have a father in their lives.” Seen them once. A week in April. Many years ago. “Your mother agreed, so we came back.” Sent flowers for Chick and Ardella’s funerals. Note of condolence. “That was important.”

The notebook. Cleaning out the warehouse. Discarding. Making room for products that would not sell. Lodged there, a lost relic on those dusty shelves. An ark of understanding. Brown with age and creased by water long since evaporated. Bold print across the cover, thick blue ink: John’s Book. Below that smaller: July—1972. The past as held in one hand. Times before. Retrievable in unexpected moments. Things forgotten, discarded. Young words held like a chalice. Importance only through contrast. Felt sacred, as if I should not be touching it. Omens and prophecies. Deserve interpretation. Child Father Man.

Scribbling across, faded pencil scratches. Indecipherable. Look to be sums, figures. Computation. Things that matter. Smaller print, same thick blue ink, bottom corner: can’t have a field with one element. Unknown context. Secreted it home, hidden in another folder. I could not tell them of its existence. The presence of God is said to be permanently blinding. Gods of our youth. ChildFatherMan. Must not be revisited so directly, abruptly. Things we forget. Sometimes must be so. So as not to gauge. Our present selves. Filled with poems, notes, future mother to future father. Tenderness now defiled by age, routine. Considered themselves romantics. One of the poems, her flowery and ordered script. “At Eden Park with Emily and Sarah.” Top of page: Sept. 30, 1973:

Love-
Can demand nothing
But only give-
Is not a prison
In which to hold
Captive but is a
Universe in which
The soul can roam-
Free to share
The joy it feels
With all it beholds.

The sound of a ~~chi~~
A child is surely
The music of
The universe
Enjoy it for
It too soon ~~ends~~
ends.

Bland sunlight, platitudes. Defiled by age, routine. ~~Ends~~. Truth. "Of course, after we moved back, they moved to Santa Monica.... Barbara one time, before they moved, she said if I wanted back into her life, she told me, she was almost pleading, that she would let me. Back. I've got to tell you, I really thought about it. But that life, I just couldn't do it anymore. The sales, lying to people. That's what sales is, you know, lying to people. That's why I liked working so much at the mental home in California. It didn't pay much, but it was helping people. That mattered more then."

"Yea, but then the eighties came around and you went right back in to sales."

"Her parents were wealthy too, Barbara's, but I just... I just couldn't do it, not to Cristi....If I only knew now." Dustless laughter. Mirthless laughter of the damned.

That desperate note. Back page of the notebook. Old ink more smeared than the rest. Too close to the water that has warped it. "*Darling, I am very sorry that it has to be this way, but I see no future us at this time. Best of the world for you. love, John.*" No date given. Timeless. Her response. Took detective work. Backtrack to the center of the notebook. Pink ink, equally smeared by indeterminate fluid. Equally desperate. "*Dear John, I hope this night away from me has shown you how much you need me instead of how easy you could get along without me. I'm so empty...dreading going to bed because it will just be empty too...I don't want to stand in the way of you and Barbara, but I love you so much...I wish you could need me the same way...I'm so afraid you'll come home tomorrow to pack. Oh please!! Love me always. I love you dearly. Cris.*" Pleading.

Longer (Use of ellipses). Searching for his deep well of pity. Guilt as love. I wonder if that was his intent, guilt reversed upon his guilt.

“Did I ever tell you about the first time I went out to California?” Yes. “It was after I left Barbara, quit working for Rayco. The guys at Rayco gave me a few months, then called me up. The manager was transferred to California. He wanted me to come out there with him. I was their best salesman, you know.” That part true. Seen the old plaques and steins and trophies. Salesman of the year. Countless times over.

“I just told him I couldn’t do it anymore, but he said it was different out there, finally talked me into to it. I asked him if I could bring someone with me, another salesman from the branch, told him he wouldn’t regret it. James was a drinking buddy of mine from there, real good guy. We were young then, both of us hungry. He didn’t need much convincing.” Or you. Said you left Barbara to reject that life. *A paradox of note*. “On the drive out there, I got a case of beer and some whiskey—Cristi was...still in Evansville I guess—and James pulls out this bag of dope that looked like it must’ve weighed about a half pound,” This facet of the story new. Never mentioned the dope before. Miniscule pause, a stutter before telling it now. A hesitation. Must have decided. Could. Should. Must. To relate to me. Aching. Fragile humanity. The bonds we bear, maintain. That others might so easily break. “and we drove right on through,” *Miles to go*. “only we got to the desert and decided to stop in Vegas. The next morning we’re broke, I mean broke,” Laughing, his youth recaptured in reflection. Immortal youth. Loss not so permanent then, not so eternal.

“So I called up Rayco,” laughing again, “told him we had been robbed, I said, ‘Yea man, you wouldn’t believe it, robbed right on the strip.’ They wired us out some money, enough for a hotel for the night and gas to get to Los Angeles. This time we didn’t gamble it away.... And that’s how we got to Los Angeles. After awhile Cristi came out and... that was that.”

“But what about the second time? You had that chance to go back there when I was a kid and what did you do?... You stopped in Texas... fucking Texas.”

“Yea,” smiling to himself, “I know. I just thought it would be nice to live someplace new. The job lined up in Los Angeles was good, but...I don’t know. I just couldn’t go back; it wouldn’t have been the same.”

“I never even got a chance to see Los Angeles. Just think, I could’ve been raised out there.”

“But you wouldn’t be who you are now.”

“That might not be a bad thing, you know.”

“What do you think you would be doing if you had grown up out there?”

“I don’t know...maybe a director...something more than this...shit, even a meth head in L.A. would be better than this.”

“Goddammit! I don’t like hearing you say things like that. You’re worth

more than that.”

“To who? This is America, dad. Material is all that matters.”

“You don’t believe that.”

“Of course not, but it’s still the fucking truth. You know that as well as I do.”

“I just wanted to live in Texas for a while, stop thinking so much about it.”

Texas. Sunday school. Mormons, stock nonperishables under the bed, year’s supply at least, in case of any—throwback to their cult roots, fear of cataclysm from the outside world, fear of violent, encroaching sanity. Must be prepared. Called it pragmatic. Once. Shortly before leaving Texas. For good or ill. Walking in from Sunday school with Cristi, you lying there in your underwear on the couch, food scattered about you, more than one man should eat, television blaring, rising shamefaced with the television. Didn’t think we’d be home so soon. Must have been dozing. I could tell even then, *Daddy not right. Mommy, what’s wrong with daddy?*, what would become. *Leaving so soon with mommy. No slam door, that’s bad. Don’t pull so hard, I can’t walk fast like you.*

Once said. In passing. Problem with prescription drugs. Was that then? Too young to notice. Innocence only has open eyes. Slowly they must close. The better to see you with.

“I just opened the Help Wanted in Houston, got a new job. It was as easy as that. Made good money, for a while. I was always a good salesman. That was important to me then... You get older, you see how none of that really matters.” *The grotesque illumination of failure.* “It was just... I could have been a History teacher, once. I think I would have liked that. You know that, right? I was only a semester away, from graduating. I used to love history, but Barbara was accustomed to... the money was just too good. I dropped out, took that other route... I could have been a History teacher.” Soft plaintive words. Who is he pleading with? Me? Himself? “Can’t be undone now.” History?

He planted trees when I was young, when this home was new. All was green then, it seemed. Too large now, overgrown. Some too near the house, working their roots through the foundation. Destroying what they cannot skirt. The house is crumbling. Slowly. Only recognized in the aftermath. There is a crack working its way through the drywall surrounding the doorframe. Just noticed the other day. At first I thought it was the relic of a spider’s web. Closer inspection. A fissure, slivered breach that portends worse to come. It can only increase from here, rupture. A great central hollow place into which this house will sink. All things have their reactions and negations. Only a matter of time. Always a matter of time.

Time. That time. Before last winter. Before. Warehouse again. Source of all things holy and profane. Grail that defiles the seeker with fertility truths known but unacknowledged. Presence of God. Blinding.

Working late, past the hour of dismissal. Diligent little wonder. Walking

through showroom, to leave, forget another day. Forfeited hours, unfiled to memory. Until. The shapes of mass on the floor. Fleishy hanging flesh, distorted, flapping, molding upon one another. Grotesque eight-limbed floor walker, uprooted from some primordial past. Ugly wrinkled and contorted flesh, pressing against one another. Image began to solidify. Distinct forms, intertwined. The salesman. Atop her.

Her head rocked back, aslant to gauge the witness, I. Witness to these deeds. Her flowery and ordered script. Hanging and wrinkled flesh. Witness to these deeds. Her protracted “oohh” that stretched and rose with my nausea, as my witness became hers. Sight through my eyes. Less shame. Humiliation. Embarrassment. Her tawdry self. Her ugly wrinkled and barren flesh. Sight through my eyes.

I gave them no chance to explain. Tore the hinges from the door as I left. Felt the metal snap as I slammed the door open. Know it as truth. Sent me a text: We have to talk about this before dad— Ended there. Could not complete the thought. Ask her son to hide something like this. A small scrap of humanity. I completed the thought for her. Truth cannot be contained in a box. Not like this. She made sure to get home early that day, before he did. Sat across from me like a guilty child facing punishment, head down, hands folded upon her lap. Such a petty little child, malformed into the shape of an adult. She would get no absolution from me. Make her confession to my father. Her husband.

He drank for awhile afterwards, until the night he shit himself while vomiting into the toilet, thick globules of masticated food and Cointreau. Purging the poisons from his body. Because his mind could not.

I told him we should leave. Refused. His desperate and grasping love. Still held on to his sinking buoy. The polluted river.

Wanted to tell Anne. Salesman’s wife. He asked me not to. Said it would be my decision. Let her retain her dignity. Her figment of reality. I refused dignity, but relented for him. His desire. Deserves that. Maybe the last one left.

“It’s a crazy world,” rousing himself as he speaks. He has been dozing. He does that now. In and out of dream and reality. Waves of consciousness. Tide at crest and ebb. Mostly ebb. Rising from sleep. Lazarus without the miracle. Our graceless world.

He struggles from his chair in this half-lit room, flesh no longer held to form. Hobbles to the door feebly aided by his cane, its unraveling handle. Crushed words as he crosses the fractured threshold, “Well, time for me to go.... Wait for release from my penance.”

He closes the door, hinges squealing against this sinking house, its root-torn and crumbling foundation.

Still, he’s losing weight again. Some glimmer of hope. Light still flickering somewhere. Not proud. Almost.

Let it come down.

BOYS HOLDING HANDS AFTER DINNER

Madison Cyr

They pass in the lascivious night,
Great curtained night—
buttress to fathoms of desire
both the gray and hot.
They part as one body
'round a post
reunited in many soles.
Unmatched bravery in an act
The rest of us take
for granted.
This is still new and the jeers
send them feet apart
hands in pockets
crooked mouths,
“Should we laugh or frown?”
We expect them to laugh.
We expect them to be made impenetrable through wit.
They're not real—too fun to be real.
So they mustn't frown, no,
Just laugh—that's right,
that's where the strength lies
in pretending that what matters doesn't.
I want to tell them that they're not a game
and that I know we could learn a thing or two
from them about love.
About its resolution.
Resolute to the point of foolishness,
when to deny it is to deny the very essence of yourself.
We could do well to learn
how to be a fool
and how to wrap ourselves around each other
to ward off the cold

and how to hold hands
even when the eyes all around
would rather us be holding guns.

SENESCENCE

Thomas Olges

When I grow older, I'll insist
On calling every woman "Miss"
With hat tipped over wrinkling brow
I'll offer, dim eyes twinkling, bows
Those women quite as old as me
Will channel long-gone girlish glee
And titter, as they move away
In homage to their younger days
Those women merely half my age
Will find themselves unfit to gauge
The candor of my gentleness
Or plumb the depths of my finesse
They'll smirk, perhaps, or heave a sigh
And grin, on following my eyes
But walk away, with shoulders back
Lamenting charms their husbands lack
Those youngest women, girls of late
Might shudder at my balding pate
But judging me to be unarmed
They'll warrant that there's little harm
In levying a pointed glance
Or dropping pregnant words askance
While thinking that there's little ill
In giving an old man a thrill
And for my part, I'll fantasize
About fucking them

MICA GLITTER ON MY HANDS

Maegan Neal

Upon a shelf in my bedroom rests a rock, collecting dust along with many others since the prospect of moving, cleaning, and reorganizing such a collection of rocks is not altogether appealing. For now, they are content, as is their owner, to remain undisturbed. On most days, this rock is not a star amongst its peers, but lost within the shadow of the shelf. However, on this day it catches my eye, as if to remind me of its presence, of how it is somehow more special than the others surrounding it. Having removed the dark curtains from my single window to let in the sun, this rock has decided to utilize and reflect the rays upon my eye, and I cannot help but look.

I found the rock, or it found me, on a chilly Spring day. The water of the Smoky Mountain stream was clear and cold, flowing fresh from the thaw of the mountains. Later on I would curse this thaw for the power it would have upon the rocks of the area, causing them to fall upon my path, but for that moment, I was content with its affect upon the water, but careful not to tumble into its icy grip. I was traveling with a group of fellow geology students from Indiana University Southeast. It was not my first trip to the mountains, but it was my first time there as a budding geologist, and I was seeing the world through new eyes. Like the giggly young girl I used to be, I was lost among the colorful pebbles of the stream, the kaleidoscope of colors shining behind the rushing water. My parents used to have to drag me away from stream beds and cliffs, my pockets full of “pretty rocks,” but with the other students, I was no longer alone in my wonder, and the rocks were no longer just “pretty.”

Just out of Cherokee, North Carolina, we had stopped our caravan of IU vans for some exploration time in the stream. Seeking to distance myself from the group a bit, due in part to my competitive need to find the most interesting rock and also for my need for some quiet, I walked further down the stream and found a shallow spot. Tip toeing on precarious rocks that sometimes teetered with my weight, I moved out to the middle of the water and searched the ripples for something to catch my eye. However, I knew not to look for a sparkle or a flash of bright color, but for a jumbled and darkened mess of whites and blacks, most likely covered with a brown coating of stream mud. At

home, most plain rocks in the stream were plain inside and out, usually limestone or shale, usually uninteresting to my eye for mystery. In the Smokies, every rock was beautiful, new. Power had reigned here once, massive power, and that meant metamorphic rocks, like nothing I could ever see in boring Southern Indiana.

No, in the Smokies, something wonderful has happened. About 350 to 300 million years ago, the continent of Africa collided with North America, subjecting the entire eastern coast to massive stress. Buckled and bent like tin foil, the crust was thrust upward into mountains that reached the height of the Rockies or higher (Millions of years of erosion have reduced them to the “hills” they are today). Long settled sedimentary rocks were transformed as heat and pressure from the collision caused their minerals to essentially “melt” and realign chemically into new forms. The cores of the mountains became striped, black and white Gneiss, or layered and sparkled Schist, but some sediments were only partially transformed, touched by nature’s brutality but left only with scars. Slightly affected but not able to fully take on new names, these “metasediments” are scattered throughout the Smoky Mountains, resting as geological reminders of how nature does not always follow rules. My rock is one of these, one of those caught in-between one classification and another, not quite allowed into the next world, but taken away from its first. I find my rock beautiful as I look, like I look into the mirror each morning, but I also find it mysterious and challenging. “What is this rock?” I ask, as simply as I ask myself, “Who am I?”

A jumbled mess of whites, and grays, and blacks, the rock is a picture of metamorphism, of the chaos of heat and pressure that once formed it. Sunshine flashes off an abundance of mica flakes and books, floating in a sea of chalky white plagioclase and clear quartz. These minerals follow no order within, as if the pieces were once floating in a vat of molten liquid which, upon cooling, became their prison. Their orientation is random, not aligned or stratified as in some textbook description of the metamorphic character. No, nature follows no certain rules here, and this rock is caught somewhere in between what geologists like to classify. It is neither sturdy and beautiful like the granite nor loose and flexible like the sandstone. Instead, the rock is a mutant, for life was not content with letting it stay in its original form. At the mercy of nature, conformed and deformed, changed and changed again, this piece of earth faced the challenge of the world,

neither winning nor losing, but finding a new life in the consequences of its environment. Perhaps submission is not a proper description, but adaptation, for beauty is the result. Time and its forces change everything, but finding loveliness in what is given to us is the true test. Can I find beauty in blemishes and flaws, in lines and pain?

Beauty lies in the sharp edges of the quartz, intermingled with the parched and somewhat browned plagioclase. It lies within the mica books with layers flaking off like the worn pages of some ancient text, which being exposed to the world's air brown and curl at the edges, crumbling when one turns the page. The clean, jagged edges were not exposed to the violence of the weathering stream, rain, or wind. The surface is a crystal wonderland, a miniature landscape of mineral mountains. If I could walk upon that surface, what would I find? These new minerals are only reorganized representations of a past self, of pieces of an earlier history, where words have been cut out and glued in a new pattern. What existed before cannot be truly known, only speculated, for time and pressure have taken their toll on the old. Is the beauty a mask, or is such a simple thing, a rock upon my bookshelf, a true phoenix, born from the ashes more beautiful than before. If so, I think I might be jealous of such a gift.

I pick up the rock to observe it further, turning it over to study the shell of such beauty, only to find it dull and uninviting, an outward appearance in contrast to such inner brilliance. Rounded and browned by long travels in water and submergence in filth, the skin of the small boulder reveals nothing of what one might find inside. Is it a camouflage, or the layering of a life in exile? It is only a piece of what it once was, a scared and battered remnant of something far greater. Once it was part of a larger deposit, but subjected to the forces of wind and rain and ice, fighting to remain at home, but slowly pulled away as the fracturing grew larger. Rolled and tumbled in a mountain stream, it was scraped against pebbles and sand, slammed against boulders until finally getting lodged beneath fellow travelers and buried in the sediment. Before that, where and what was it? Before the heat and pressure altered it and forced it to change, what was its name? Before the heave and bend of mountain building, the collision of great continents, where did it rest? It is such a mystery, such a small thing. So much history lies in both beauty and scars.

But wait, hiding amongst the tangled minerals is another type of scar. A blush of orange paint, as if drawn, marks a small point. I



MIRROR TREE

Digital Photography
S.D. Lintz

remember now, where this scar is from; this mark is from man. I placed it there, disgracing the natural loveliness with an alien tattoo. The shattered edges and the orange smudge indicate the incursion of tools unknown to Gaia, but known to the working geologist. Do they mark discovery or attack? With brutality was revealed the inner beauty; the ugly shell was cracked open and overcome. The wonderful workings of heat and pressure were revealed to me, collected, and put on display. Muddied boots and cold hands were the only consequences for me; well, except for the unfortunate amount of landslides that delayed our return home. I remember the workings of nature that day seemed to conspire against us, sending us at least a hundred miles off of our path, but leading us to new discoveries nonetheless. Nature and life do that, send us rolling and tumbling down mountain streams, sometimes burying us in filth, but holding us there to be discovered by that which will newly define us. But what hint could have told me of what I would find in the center of an austere rock in a Smoky Mountain stream? Curiosity, searching for the true individual behind the mask created by time; this is what led me, what must lead all geologists. Time is a wonderful artist, capable of weaving banality and splendor. But in nature, what is banality and what is splendor?

In life, what is normal? Can any of us really be defined, or like my rock, are we lost in between two, or three, or a million descriptions of the self. From giggly rock collector to geology student, I have followed no explicit path. Cook, nutritionist, writer, environmentalist, geologist; these have all been my descriptions, but they all come together in an attempt to define me. But like the earth, I am constantly changing, constantly at the mercy of my surroundings, the people I know, and the choices I make. My outside, my inside, they are both parts of my history. Sometimes, the veil hides what the inside has endured and attempts to keep it a mystery from the world, but hiding those marks is like hiding our own morphology. Is it right to do so? Is it better to remain lost in the rush of the water, resting at the bottom of the cool stream? I wonder if the rock would have preferred to keep its camouflage, to remain amongst the sediment of the mountain stream, listening to the flow of the water, the chirp of the birds, the quake of the mountain. I wonder.

Such wonder lies in the small things of nature, of the stories they have to tell us. But sometimes the revelation requires destruction; the removal of bone from stone, of mineral from cave, of stone from

stream. We remove to learn of the world. We take pieces of Gaia and carry them home, placing them in some strange environment. We study them like the nonliving objects that they are, but are they really so dead? Can an object with such a story to tell have never lived? I place the rock back on my shelf, mica glitter on my hands.

ADVENT

Thomas Olges

Grudgingly
He finds himself
Parent-pushed into a pew already packed
By end-of-year guilt
With right-now-and-Easter Catholics
But St. Mark's is bearing witness
To a true Christmas miracle
In the form of their neighbors' eldest daughter
Home from school for the holidays
He bows his way
To the bench beside her
A scraping supplicant before his seven-year senior
Dares a nervous nod, with
Downcast eyes

She is sleek and stunning
Trussed raven-black
Imminently desirable
Transcendently mysterious
Beneath her scratchy woolen coat
He contemplates the Eucharist
Ecstatically
Imagines following her to the host
Plumbing with his lips
The cold metal rim of the vessel
For a trace of her:
Sweet, identifiable and defiant
Amidst the sour sea of holy blood

Except
Her perfume reaches him
As surely as if censor-swung
Something irrationally grown-up: cloying, floral/not floral
Chanel, he thinks
Though he would have thought that regardless

He recognizes its scent, if not its name
From the sticky insert ads of his older sister's Elle magazines
It fills his nostrils with the sickly sweet smell
Of furtive afternoon masturbation
It engorges him inexorably
—Pavlovian—
His mind a dizzying reel
Of sculpted fashion model flesh
Artfully framed and strategically exposed
He flushes, flustered
Flounders
Wrings reedy responsorials from lungs blazing
With shame and arousal
He stands, unnerved, conspicuously close
To the pew in front of him
Takes the still, gloved hand of his neighbor
Wavers his way through the Lord's Prayer
Praying now only that this cup might be taken from him
That either evening mass or his own errant erection
Might be cancelled
But her presence
And her scent
Prove eternal and unyielding as the mysteries of transubstantiation
And soon it is time for him to rise, with the congregation, and make his
way
Still risen
To take communion

Jesus hangs
At the front of the chapel
Immortal and dying
Omnipotent and vulnerable
Triumphant and suffering
Lacquered
The only one there
With the blessed compassion
To avert his eyes

SETTLERS

Madison Cyr

A spectral dust settles...
(The breath of the undead)
In the moaning avenues
It settles –
On the heads of dogs,
And gray birds,
And fine-fingered girls
All done up for
Joyrides
And cherries
Matte with dust
Under rugs,
Couches...
The tongues of men
Numb with
Proffered epithets
And musky thighs thick and taut as a
Round lake boiling in light.
These are the days untouched by
Decency.
Unkissed by empathy.
Undone by lust.
When the yawing yoking
Fairy nights are left to fester—
Left to settle
With wings
and words full-fallen
to remember in the gray depths of aged
winter.
Presently, the
Pavement
Heaves
And settles
Between lines of grass.
The rib-cage
Of our sub-urban

sprawl settles over
guts—
mycelium,
bedrock,
the moho,
fossilized sunlight
and so many limbs
as constitutes an enormous
centipede
clinging to itself
to make a spheric
bracelet.
Here the moans sink down
And settle
To be burned and spat,
Expectorated and masticated
By countless single
Double digiters intent upon
Stealing each other's hearts.
But this is all too soon—
Because before we made an
Art of feelings and fucking
We enjoyed it.
And before that even,
We settled into this atmospheric bleed
Flaunting our mud-hide
And dreaming of naked islands
To be us—fed fat and painting.
Anonymous time
All fades,
All settles,
Densely at first,
Then, quietly,
No more distinction—
And the mass of love,
Too full to fall,
Envelopes mortality.



COUNTRY HOME MAIN HALL

Digital Photography
S.D. Lintz

WILDERNESS

Chelsea Beville

I read about how God caused
The nerve to throw off its skin
leaving scars on the shy hand
of Moses.

No matter.

God is not in
The young men
of the earth
Their skin glistens
With the sweat
of work of earth
under their fingernails
Even after a bath
and a shave
the scent of men
lingers in the air
bewitches me
in the wilderness
of the night,
the wild desert places
in the dark alleys
and the rocky streets
where water never
flows freely
and I'm struck
and drunk
with wine
not made
from water.

No matter.

I will read about how God
Threw the nerve from my skin
leaving scars on my shy hands
like Moses.

NATURAL WAR

Madison Cyr

Margaret knew with a resounding ache that there was something just beyond her window. If you were to ask her what this might be she would have no answer. She would feel that uncomfortable twinge brought on by her own ignorance. But there was no one to ask her. She embraced sinister nothing.

She sat for hours, mustering up courage, perhaps. Or perhaps she saw slightly ahead, only slightly, and she felt a quivering heat in her tight fingers. Regardless of her reasons, there came a point, a significant dot upon her mind, when reasons seemed to be paltry, stiff creations that contemporary fears flung at the face of nature. And she stepped out the window.

The blades were so aptly named. They cut across her unshorn feet, stabbing at her sole and her creaselessness. The wings which she had kept regimentally trimmed grew ragged in the mist, heavy with cool scentless dew. The wind croaked with the very breath of god and the lizard and the heavens gasping at our ugliness.

It was a sudden realization, the thing. It was the knee deep loving grass and the sensual breast hills aching for her tender feet. And all of this combined made a sound louder than bombs and the simultaneous destructions of bird's nests being trampled and children being lost and wives bemoaning some loneliness and girl scouts knocking on doors. Somewhere among these things Margaret allowed her heels to create a sickle in the dirt. With that small, remarkable movement, her very soul erupted and she felt within her all the stirrings of a great and tragic race.

A monarch, not unlike the winged or the dictating marched by in flight and the poetry of light and color gave death to fear. Oh that she were a stinging insect with the power to alight hate with nothing. But so do we all—not so different. But back to her wings. So subtle they must be human, but they served the purpose. Many, as we humans tend to do, acting on various words and desires.

‘my cup runneth over’ and the stampede begins so that my wings flutter and of course they do so on their own accord. I cannot stop the rumple of the waterwindsong from making them move. Instead I watch in awe as the shadows match up and I am caught in a hailstorm of prophet’s lies the cling ice tongues melting into one. I know that he was a liar and that we all eat ice cream and enjoy it and that we all orgasm and that we all hate and that we all believe in god.

Blunder and the tongues smote the mishap. Victor and the arms raise up to come down again so that losing and winning and being and dying are negotiable terms. She wants a fifth of bourbon and a cigarette to quell this massive heat wave collecting on her wings—bubbling up glinting with all the possibilities of light. The light from the oil fields clanging in the east were calling and the immigrant’s green eyes and the pre-love lightning and the awful ferns that popped up incessantly bringing back history. History of tartans and the shared caresses between blood the too-similar lips wrapping ‘round like slugs in love.

Oh these too-entwined strings of love. But could your brother love you thus? For now, she had time to think about such things. The fish of the earth wriggled and she could know, objectively, what that meant. Perhaps she was a god. To only know the fish and the reasons and the nothing of your head and your heart that carries only pictures

The summit approaches. A keen green line. Soon, so soon the beeps and buzzes will ignite a fury. A kicking of feet and a quick making of love and paltry pecks on cheeks and breasts and pricks-- love is a momentary flicker flashing capturing an awkward smile. But I can sit here gazing at a huge cacophonous orchestra of light and breath. As the branches trick themselves into blossoming their purity I am tumbling back into the acre of mine. Back into the concrete patio. Back into the glass sprinkled. Back into an anonymous chair hammered by an anonymous Amish girl. Back into the room that has promoted a life of lethargy. Back into days and the folding of wings.



3RD TRIMESTER 2

Ceramics
Rebeka Trapp

KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS

Thomas Olges

I'm not the man who wrote all those love letters.

There's a legal pad in my desk, its margins filled with scribbled phrases and stricken-through words. It's the pad of a man who wrote love letters; painstakingly, secretively, agonizing over turns of phrase and double entendres. It's not my pad, and they weren't my letters—I'm not that man.

I am separated from that man by a gulf of time. I'm living his dreams. Fulfilling or abandoning his aspirations. I've learned from his mistakes. Our perspectives are unique now, separated by an accumulation of time denser and more impassible than any physical barrier.

I'm not even the man who spent a half-hour grooming himself this afternoon. Filing his nails, pulling the small stray hairs from his ears and nostrils—I'm not him anymore. I'm not the man who left work early today, rushing out of the office like a kid on the last day of school. His anticipation isn't mine. I'm not the man who hesitated in the motel parking lot, his guts twisted by a momentary pang of queasy guilt. Not the man who stowed his wedding band in the glove box. Hell, I'm not even the man to whom that ring was given—haven't been for the better part of two decades now. Right now, I'm nearly nothing. I'm not a man of letters, or vows, or guilt or anticipation. I'm a pale smear amidst darker smears: a point of contrast against which a cheap green comforter looks as black as the shadows pooled upon it. I'm a shell of cooling, sweat-soaked skin, emptied of everything but ebbing euphoria and idle reflexivity. In the bathroom, the toilet is flushing, but that sound and its author are as far-removed from me as the stars in the sky outside.

I'll be another man soon enough. A heavier man, an older man—a man with graying hair and a mortgage and a shitty job. A man who slips his wedding band back on, drives across town, and gets home just in time to slide into his own bed. That man will give his wife a brief kiss on the cheek, listen to her coo him muffled words of support about the demands of his job. He'll roll onto his right side behind her, throw a leaden left arm over her shoulders, and lull himself

into a shallow sleep with a harrowing internal litany of abasement and recriminations.

But I'm not him yet. The myth that we are one is a cheap parlor trick. A man can't set foot in the same river twice, nor can he be who he once was or someday will be. Contiguity is a coincidence of experience, an illusion created by an unrestrained ego. It shackles the present to the past while poisoning it with the future.

It's all very zen.

HERE, BULLET: A BOOK REVIEW

Katelyn Wilkinson

Brian Turner had completed his MFA from the University of Oregon when his career path changed trajectory; rather than begin publishing or teaching like his fellow writers might have done, Turner enlisted in the army. The collection produced stems from one year specific to his seven served, during which he was an infantry team leader in Iraq with the 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division. This 2005 Beatrice Hawley Award-winning collection *Here, Bullet* accomplishes what other war poetry collections have not; instead of bringing the soldier home and turning him into a poet, it sends poet Brian Turner to the frontlines of war and asks him to report back.

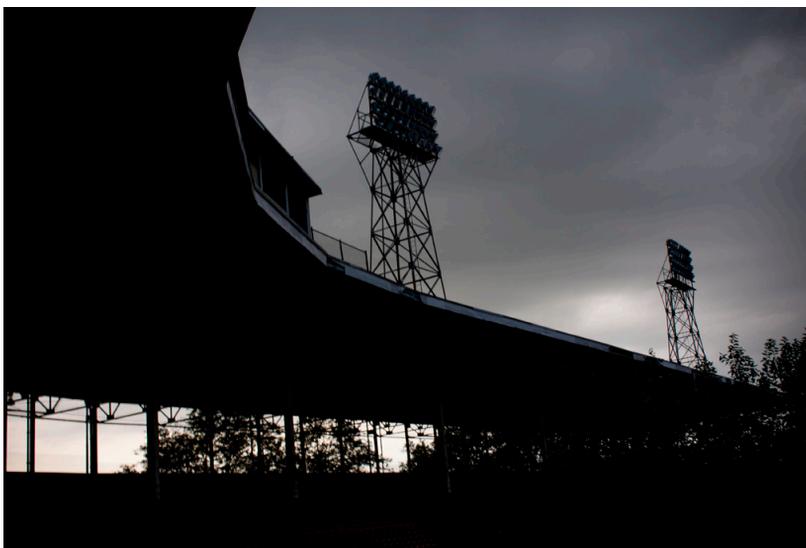
Report he does. The poems of *Here, Bullet* struggle with mortality in the face of combat as well as ideas of compassion verses judgment, morals and consequences. This powerful *mêlée* of ethics comes to the forefront of poems such as “Sadiq,” “A Soldier’s Arabic” and “Kirkuk Oilfield, 1927.” While asking the difficult questions about war, Turner does well to steer clear of the politics that drive it. In fact, Turner does his best to marry both sides by putting aside cultural differences and focusing on the effects of war on the generations entrenched in it, as can be seen in “The Hurt Locker.”

The collection as a whole mirrors an impending sense of constant loss using highly controlled imagery, allusion and exceedingly specified personal experience. This method of control is well executed in the title poem “Here, Bullet” in which Turner breaks down the bullet entering his body and, in doing so, connect man with machine. In this poem, as in many others in Turner’s collection, is a very specific air of detachment in that he is careful never to let the reader fully in; leaving the audience wondering what Turner truly thinks of his own work.

If it has one shortcoming, it is in that too often the poems are fractured into intangible tactical observations rather than remain tactilely connected to themselves, and in turn, the reader. Several poems are built in this mold, including “Observation Post #71” and “Ashbah.” If Turner so detaches himself from his subject, the reader will have much more trouble assigning meaning to the things he witnesses.

Even with the lack of connection found in some poems, it is hard to fault a veteran for detaching himself from the horror of war, poet or

not. The sense of detachment often works to his advantage, including in one memorable poem, "Repatriation Day." It is in these lines that Turner finds himself so tired of conflict that he identifies more with his fellow soldiers in their caskets than he does with himself. Perhaps, however, that is Turner at his best, demonstrating the effect of warfare on the mind of a soldier.



FORGOTTEN PASSTIME

Digital Photography
S.D. Lintz

MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

Courtney Robinson

I saw a bottle lying in the street. It was the kind
With the snapshots on the label,
Of sailboats and children on swingsets,
And dogs chasing toddlers, and pretty girls
In sunglasses, and circuses,
Of a million carefree scenes of summer romps and twilight dreams,
Where the sun is always shining and everyone is smiling.
It reminded me of the game I used to play as a child,
Making up stories of what life must be like
Within those pictures. Funny how different
Things seem once the camera is gone, and all we are left with
Is reality. I tore off the label
And wrote my name on the back,
Put my message in the bottle
And tossed it out to sea.
Now I play a different game when the camera is gone,
Imagining my life inside the bottle, where everyone is smiling,
Oblivious to the tempest outside,
And I float on.

ALREADY SEEN

Thomas Olges

It started with an errant thought in front of the bookshelf.

He'd just put Max down for the night, and he was returning their copy of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* to its place with a bemused, inward chuckle. It was becoming increasingly difficult to satisfy the boy with their established 10-page-a-night pace; tonight they'd only just found out that the villain behind everything had been Quirrell and not Snape, and Max had nearly squealed with shock and glee.

It's a wonder he even cares at this point, Peter reflected, given how many times he's heard it.

Peter paused, brow furrowed, the book only halfway slid into its customary position. It was an odd thing to think—they'd only started reading through the book this summer, and Peter was quite sure that Max's mother hadn't read it to him. For that matter, the book wasn't even all that familiar to Peter; he'd only read it through once before starting with Max, and that had been over a decade ago now.

He shrugged the odd thought away and finished shelving the book. A neural misfire, he supposed, and nothing worth worrying about. He turned off the hallways lights, casually, and made his way lightly down the stairs. If he was lucky, he'd have a few solid hours to spend editing before he had to turn in himself.

At the bottom of the steps, he realized that he couldn't get to work just yet. Thursday was trash day, and he'd missed pick-up last week. If he didn't get his cans around tonight, he'd be hard pressed to squeeze anything else into them for the next seven days. He let out a little sigh, more resolute than weary, and made his way to the back door.

Except that his keys were missing.

Peter stopped short in front of the door, taking a moment to stare dumbly at the empty hook just inside it. He made it a habit to always leave his keys there; they bothered him when he kept them in his pocket, so he left them perpetually on the hook whenever he was in the house. *Well, he thought, you're in the house now—so where are your keys?*

He turned, almost automatically, and glanced down at the countertop to his right. His keys were there, glinting at him from the unceremonious little heap into which they'd been dropped. He reached for them slowly, unsteadily, the way Max reached out for a piece of

candy when he feared it would be withdrawn.

Peter picked up his keys, and spent a moment standing by the back door and weighing them in his hand. They felt normal enough against his palm, pointy and cool and relatively heavy, for all that they'd been out of place. He could swear that he'd hung them on the hook after returning from the post office today—had a clear memory of having done so. Maybe Max had been playing with them, or Rita had stopped by to get something without saying “hello.” Maybe someone was messing with him.

Or maybe, he thought, you're just getting old. Peter shoved his keys into his front pocket and shook his head. *Better hurry up with the garbage, before your mind goes completely.* Heeding his own advice, he flipped on the back porch light and pushed his way through the door.

It was nice outside—no more than 70 degrees on the outside—and he paused on his back porch to enjoy the night air. His brief trip to the post office this afternoon had been miserable, but he supposed a front must have rolled through and broken the humidity sometime in the evening. He scanned the horizon for a lingering trace of cloud, but all he could see was clear black sky and bright blue stars. Still, it still *felt* outside like a storm had just rolled through; the air seemed somehow closer than normal, and static-y.

Keep your eye on the prize, he told himself, trash cans. Whistling tunelessly, he hopped down from his porch and trotted over to the corner of the garage. He would be glad to get them emptied; any fuller and his cans would start attracting scavengers—

His trash cans were gone.

Peter felt goosebumps rising on his arms and neck, and the tune on his lips died out in a cartoon-style slidewhistle noise. He looked around, a little more urgency in his movements than he would have liked, but there wasn't even a leftover scrap of trash in his backyard. If animals had tampered with his cans, there would at least be some evidence. *Someone's definitely fucking with you, he thought, either that or you're losing your mind.*

Jaw set, Peter left his backyard and strode down his driveway toward the street. *You must have taken them around this afternoon and forgotten about it, he thought. Or maybe one of your neighbors was worried that you'd forget and attract animals, so they did it for you. Or maybe Rita did it this afternoon when she stopped by and moved your keys.*

Sure enough, his trash cans were sitting by the curb, gleaming dully

in the streetlights. He slowed his pace, moving toward them with the same wariness with which he'd picked up his keys moments before. He was stricken suddenly with a clear memory of walking toward his trash cans just like this, his movements measured by this same slow uncertainty. It was *like déjà vu*, but not quite—he could swear that the last time he did this, it was raining.

Peter reached his trash cans and gave one an experimental prod. It rocked back and forth a little, easily, obviously emptied of its contents. Just to be sure, he pulled the lid off of it, then leaned in close to inspect the inside. There was nothing inside but an inch or two of foul-smelling water. He replaced the lid in a hurry.

Garbage men already came, he thought, *which must mean it's already Thursday*. The idea made Peter shiver, although he couldn't say exactly why. He did sometimes lose track of time during the summer, when Max was out of school and the only work he did was piecemeal editing. Still, he'd just gone to the post office this afternoon, and he went to the post office every Wednesday. *Garbage men could have come early*, he surmised, *or you could have gone in on the wrong day*—

He saw a flash, then, or thought he saw a flash. It was brief—so brief that he barely even registered it—like a single out-of-place frame in a movie reel. It had been a sterile blue color, bright and piercing like a flash of lightning, but he was sure he'd seen it. He looked up to the sky again, scanning for clouds, but all he saw was the clear, cold twinkling of the stars.

Peter's stomach turned over. *You're having a stroke*, he thought, *or a transient ischemic episode, or whatever the fuck it's called. You need to get inside, quickly, and call the fucking hospital*. He left his trash cans on the street and went back to the house, only barely keeping himself from breaking into a run. *You've got time*, he thought, *you just need to act quickly*.

He let himself in through the back door, tossing his keys absent-mindedly onto the countertop at his side. His phone was probably still in his office; he'd call the hospital first and then wake up Rita. She could meet him at the hospital and pick up Max; he certainly didn't want the boy to have to hang around the hospital with him all night. He took a deep breath, strove to maintain an even pace as he walked to his study. *You've got time*, he told himself again. *You've got time*.

He flipped on the lights in his study and lowered himself into his desk chair. Sitting down made him feel calmer, as if he were making a



SOLE MATES

Digital Photography
Lyndsey Cooper

simple business call and not a plea for emergency medical assistance. He reached across the desk for his phone, but stopped halfway when his eye fell over his daily calendar. It still read Wednesday the 9th, just as he would have guessed a half-hour ago, although he knew now that that must be incorrect. The garbage men had already come, which meant that it was Thursday now—

—at least.

Peter's stomach turned over again, and he heaved a sour sigh. *How many days have you missed? How long have the trash cans been empty? How long have you been reading Max the same ten pages of Harry Potter every night?*

Peter frowned. Max was only 5, but he was willful and bright enough that he would have said something if his bedtime reading had been a rerun. He pulled his hand away from his phone. Unless Max was suffering from the same mental problems that were plaguing his father, there was no reason to think that Peter had lost a day at all. *There's another explanation, he thought, or a series of them. Early trash pick-up, you forgetting where your keys were, and lightning. Check the date on your laptop, if you're concerned about lost time, before you go calling an ambulance.*

Peter's laptop was sitting in front of him, closed but probably only hibernating since his editing from the evening before. He could know within a minute what day it was, and put all this madness behind him. He hand shook as he reached out to open it, and he realized that his teeth were chattering. He couldn't say why, but opening his laptop was suddenly the last thing on Earth he wanted to do.

He did it anyway. He worked the latch with a wooden thumb, and managed to lift the screen after only 2 failed attempts. It held a pair of surprises, the first of which was the fact that it was powered down completely. The second was a yellow Post-It note, crumpled a bit and stuck unevenly to the upper-left corner of the laptop's screen. He glanced away the moment he saw it—before even reading it—his gaze falling immediately and inexplicably upon the trash can next to his desk. He registered the can's emptiness with a distant sense of mild surprise.

Peter's skin crawled. His heartbeat thudded in his ears. He could feel every ragged breath he managed to draw, wrenching its way into a pair of lungs that seemed to be withering away in some internal blaze. Dread had settled into the pit of his stomach, aggravated by the fact

that he couldn't consciously locate its source. He snatched the note from his laptop, some shred of indignation managing to override the anxiety that might otherwise have paralyzed him.

The note was written in Peter's own handwriting, and it was very brief—just three words. In black ink he'd written the words "get help" prominently across the middle of the Post-It. Underneath that, in all-caps and pencil, he'd scrawled the word "NOW." All three words had been underlined repeatedly, and an exclamation point had been written in in red ink after the third word.

He folded the note immediately, the way he did with all notes when he was done with them, and dropped it unceremoniously in the trash can where he felt sure it belonged. *Someone is fucking with you after all*, he thought, although that thought did very little to calm his nerves. The note had obviously been from him, and he had noticed upon disposing of it that it had been creased for disposal at least once before. He couldn't help but think that he'd looked for it in the trash at first because he remembered having thrown it away another time.

That was when the noises started.

They were low, low enough that at first he couldn't really pick them out against the rush of the blood in his ears. He heard a rumbling at first, like distant thunder but less distinct. Then there was a regular throbbing sound as well, and a super-high whining noise that Peter could barely register. Then there was an intermittent knocking sound, like the banging of a loose shutter—

They were all coming from Max's room.

Peter stood quickly enough that he almost knocked his chair over, parental instinct mercifully trumping the terror of which he was all too conscious. He left his study at a run, bounding up the stairs two at a time. He knew now that he'd gone this way before, felt the familiarity of his movements deep in the workings of his muscles. He'd done this before—all of it—enough times that his body had almost made it routine.

The second floor landing was alive with sound. The low rumble shook the walls, vibrating the pictures that hung on them like a movie earthquake. Now that he was closer, Peter could more easily pick out the high-pitched whine. It sounded unnervingly close to the oscillations of a dentist's drill. There was another sound as well, almost drowned out by the cacophony upstairs, and it took him a moment to identify it as his own sustained moaning.

He crossed the distance to Max's door and flung it open, still operating under the unsettling guidance of his own muscle memory. A small part of Peter's mind was fully aware of what was happening, watching with the terrified familiarity of a recurrent nightmare sufferer. He didn't want to open the door to his son's room, didn't want to see what was behind it, didn't want to announce his presence to whatever was in there—but he didn't have a choice. His actions felt scripted; all he could do was go through the motions and hope that he might still scream himself awake.

Everything in Max's room was bathed in clear, blue light, the same light that he'd caught a glimpse of while he was investigating his trash cans. It was a mercy, that light: it was bright enough that it stripped the details from the objects before him, turning the contents of Max's room into a series of grotesque shadow puppets. He could see figures moving through the glow, too large to be Max but too small to be people, loping and undulating across the foreground with an unsettling grace. They wielded tools (might have held them, but might well not have had proper hands with which to hold anything) that Peter couldn't quite distinguish: long corded rods and short pronged things with purposes he had no interest in discerning. There were three such things moving through the room, and in their midst lay the small, still figure of his son.

The shadow nearest Peter swiveled around, a lumpy oval that might have been a head turning smoothly and soundlessly toward him. There was a burst of noise not unlike CB static, after which the other two figures turned their attention to Peter as well. The blue light seemed to intensify, then, until Peter could barely see anything at all, and he thought he might be on the verge of unconsciousness. *You have to run*, he told himself, although he seemed to be rooted to the spot. *You have to RUN!*

The thing that had seen him first was moving toward him, its body blocking out some of that brilliant blue glow. As it approached, a few details of its appearance became increasingly apparent, filtering through Peter's awareness in an incoherent string. He saw wrinkled light-brown fabric or skin, pursed like the folds of a shar pei's coat. He saw an orifice that might have been a mouth, lipless and broad and glistening wetly. He saw an eye, as well, and he saw it clearly: it was roughly the size of a softball, and deep and black save for a trio of crimson pin-pricks deep within it.

It might have been the eye that did it, or it might have been that the thing in front of him was blocking the effects of the light—but whatever the reason, Peter managed to finally start moving. He turned on his heel, crossed the landing in two quick strides, then hurled himself down the stairs three at a time. He didn't look back, nor even consider where he was going—he simply fled his son's room and the thing that was doubtlessly pursuing him.

He would be caught. He knew that now, knew because he'd always been caught before. He couldn't get away from them now that they were already in his house. *You don't have enough time*, he thought, *you're going to need more time!*

Automatically, Peter hurled himself into his study and slammed the door behind him. He felt confident that he couldn't lock them out, confident that even if he had time he wouldn't be able to construct a suitable barricade. He stood in front of his desk, surveying it for something that would be of any use to him. His eyes slid past his phone and his laptop—they were dead; he didn't exactly remember that fact, but he knew it nonetheless. It was too late to get a signal out, now that they were already in the house.

Frantically, Peter stooped down and fished the Post-It note out of the garbage. He unfolded it, glancing across the writing that covered its face. How many times had he embellished this note? How many attempts had he made to warn himself of what was happening? How many nights had he lost?

How many more would he have to lose?

He grabbed a yellow highlighter out of the cup on his desk, made a thick yellow line over the text of the note. Once he'd done so, he stuck it back to the place on the corner of his laptop where he'd found it, then closed his computer. Eventually, he'd have to take the note seriously. Eventually, he'd have to go for help while there was still time.

Behind him, the door to his study opened. Peter caught a glimpse of the figure from upstairs as it wriggled its way into the room, its reflection mercifully distorted in the glass of his study window. Its movements were unnervingly fluid, as if it were being emptied into the study out of a bottle, and a wash of strange luminescence followed in its wake. That bright blue light filled the room, and Peter felt his limbs go rigid. All he could do was gaze forward, arms locked, as the thing from upstairs covered the short distance between them.

Limbs pressed against him. What might have been fingers poked

and prodded him, possibly to test that he was sufficiently immobile. He was picked up, or knocked over, or some combination of the two—he ended up lying flat across the carpet of his study. An unseen metallic object was inserted into his mouth, and he could feel something cold dripping steadily down the back of his throat.

The thing from upstairs leaned over him, and the lump that Peter assumed was its head floated slowly into his field of vision. Its mouth seemed set, grimly and determinedly immobile, and its single black eye gazed dully down at him. There was something measured about the way it moved, and something in its demeanor that suggested long routine and probable boredom.

Peter gasped, desperately strove to work his mouth around the paralytic effects of the light in his study and the metal object that had been jammed into his mouth. “Please,” he managed to splutter, “please don’t make me forget again.”

The thing above him didn’t make a sound—it merely offered him a single, slow blink of its huge, black eye.

He’d just put Max down for the night, and he was returning their copy of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* to its place with a bemused, inward chuckle. It was becoming increasingly difficult to satisfy the boy with their established 10-page-a-night pace; tonight they’d only just found out that the villain behind everything had been Quirrell and not Snape, and Max had nearly squealed with shock and glee.

It’s a wonder he even cares at this point, Peter reflected, given how many times he’s heard it.

FOR THE FALLEN SONS

Lyndon Moore

And I'm going nowhere...
fighting shadow wars in my mind
afraid of the television for the news it'll bring:
Lance Corporal, Specialist, Captain, Sergeant, Lieutenant...

God...
I have the faces of men in my mind
whose faces I saw
only after I saw
what was left of them.

Poor thin red line of humanity!
poor burnt out beautiful boy that you were!
poor blown apart golden human potential that you were!

You were your momma's love! Her son!
maybe the oldest, maybe the youngest
maybe even the man of the house—
but always her baby boy.

What happened to all those rings, those walleted pictures, that
medallion of St. Michael?
What happened to that letter from your girlfriend, still folded in your
pocket, only with
your blood on it?

I never knew you and I feel guilty for not visiting your grave.

A CHILD OF SUBURBIA

Jon Carson

I am a child of suburbia, the second generation of a generation in retreat. My people fled. When confronted with the symptoms of an underlying social disease, they opted for the placebo. Rather than admit culpability, daresay a flaw, within this American system, they embraced the new ethos with the fervor of true believers. They chose the blind ease of isolation. After all, there were still commies about then. Nuclear holocaust might decimate those forsaken cities, but God or fate (The new-age mantra – I'm not religious but I am spiritual) would never allow the destruction to devour these new oases in the great void of American culture. Like Reagan, they considered themselves eternal optimists.

This was the Me Generation. They took Ronnie's advice and forsook those ineffective social programs of the past, took their small parcels of wealth and built themselves new feudal communities away from the pernicious influence of urban life, from the decay and, "Damn it I just have to admit it honey," ugliness of poverty. They would all cite crime as a factor. Crime, that catchword that implies so much more. Safety, to them, trumped solidarity and the cooperative spirit. So they dismantled what they could and left the unlucky rest to fend for themselves (those poor bastards that didn't know it was time to abandon that sinking ship of an inner-city before the shit really hit the fan), and littered the surrounding countryside with their suburban fiefdoms.

But it was not just security they sought. They felt they were losing their identity, mixed up as they were with all these...new elements, new perspectives that unsettled the stomach and their reacquired patriotic fervor. So they heralded back to a simpler, racist time, only they would never admit that; it had nothing to do with race or dominant culture, it was just, well, crime, y'know. So they fell in to the nostalgia of Ozzie and Harriet and Wally and The Beav, good old Reagan himself as the Gipper, immaculate green lawns and sprinklers, neighborhood kids playing football in backyards, iced tea and those cute little novelty mailboxes made to look like houses. They took those quaint little lies of the past and forged them into an unholy truth all their own: It's just better this way.

I know this because these were my parents. I was one of those suburban rats.

Try as they might to escape it, the insidious red threat of failed social programs still scratched its socialist claws on their doors at night. They could see those gouges each morning as they commuted to their jobs far and away. It was a terror-inducing harbinger that kept them awake at night and clouded the sun of their blighted day. Something had to be done. And thus were children like me, children of suburbia, sent to private schools, segregated from the failure and squalor of the public school system.

St. Anthony's Grade School was white, not exactly lily-white (there were speckles of ethnicity sprinkled about in small increments, but in numbers that could be counted on the fingers of one Caucasian hand), but certainly light enough to appeal to the suburban-sprawling White-Flighters who fled the city of Louisville as the Sixties became the Eighties and never looked back. There was just enough color to appease whatever latent conscience still lingered within their fear-addled and Reaganized brains (but not to a degree that could be considered excessive or anything), just enough to fill in a few (only a few, mind you) gaps in the school's pamphlets and advertising materials.

We were to be the new echelon, not elitist like the children who attended excessively expensive prep schools, but certainly superior to the ill-equipped dross that were being vomited out of the public schools. Like any military faction, we had our uniforms. Our proper blue pants and prim skirts (although in a nod to modernity, females were now allowed to wear pants as well). Our pressed white shirts, some branded with the crest of the school. From all outward appearance, we were an indivisible and indistinguishable regiment, being conditioned to conquer this new world.

However that was the problem. You can't build a society out of faded pop culture nostalgia and conformity, at least not in this multidimensional world. Our parents, having abandoned the culture of urbanity and conciliation, had latched onto the last thing still offered in a materialistic society: Material. Conspicuous consumption. Things as distinction. Objects as definition. Personality by proxy. Their oasis revealed its desert roots.

So, like many white children my age facing this great bland emptiness of suburbia, I latched on to whatever culture still seemed distinct, alive, and viable. I got into hip-hop. By blindly retreating from that growing specter of urban blight but offering nothing in exchange, they drove me right back to that which they feared most.

I heard my first rap lyrics in, of all places, church. This predating the great migration, I was still attending St. Joseph's in Louisville, a student in the third grade. Sitting on the wooden pews during our twice-weekly church service, I heard my best friend quietly, for my ears only, began intoning "I did it like this, I did it like that, I did it with a whiffle-ball bat," while comically thrusting his groin into the solemn air. I snickered with him, not yet understanding the source of his new font of wisdom, but sharing his sense of impertinence to the proceedings. At lunch, I would learn that this was a new form of music called rap, and the prophets he had channeled were known as The Beastie Boys. My initiation had begun.

But that was the third grade, and time moved on. Mid to late-eighties hip-hop wasn't even called hip-hop then, it was still rap. But to kids like me, it had to be real rap. After awhile, The Beastie Boys just wouldn't cut it. Real rap meant ghettos, crime, bitches, drugs, and money. Real rap had to be black. Too \$hort taught me about sex, N.W.A. showed me a life of dope slangin', racist cops who deserved what they got, the injustices of the legal system, and the universal fact that a bitch is a bitch is a bitch. Ice T taught me pimpin' and the qualities inherent in an Original Gangster. This was not their exclusive territory, many others followed suit, some of whose names are now lost to my memory. The Geto Boys certainly dabbled in this social nihilism, and from them I learned that, with enough juice and no matter your size, you can't be stopped. I learned my people were racist, uptight caricatures without soul and that real life was to be found on the streets. The real streets, not the postcard streets where I lived, but the ghetto streets, the inner-city streets, the black streets. They offered the substance of reality that was missing from our secluded enclaves, the rebellion that many like me felt but could not find an outlet for. It was danger, grit, and essence. It was like manna from heaven.

Unable to forge our own identities and with an unacknowledged subconscious contempt of our barren environment, children like me latched on to this subculture as if it were our own. We pretended the danger was real, pretended to be dangerous ourselves. We acquired the clothing, the vocabulary, the verbal and physical mannerisms. Our pants sagged, our eyes feigned the hardened stare of a convict or killer. It was another form of child's play that, in this material world of personality by proxy, became our truth.

This subculture was not as widespread as it has now become.



HE

Painting
Helena G.

Indeed, in a way we were pioneers of manufactured assimilation. Fellow travelers in this cult of rap were few and far between. At that time, it solidified outcast status, which was the intended result. We did not want to be seen as products of our suburban upbringing. We affected an assumed guise, yet one equally manufactured and contrived. Although it was our truth, it amounted to the same false culture of suburbia our parents had enacted for themselves. And, like them, we eventually began to be seen as a profitable market – but that lay in the future.

I was in the seventh grade when I finally encountered my first black classmate. There had been an Indian in my class for a few years, but they didn't count. They weren't dangerous. They were future doctors, like their parents, more suited to be objects of derision than fear...I remember mocking the shaved head that had been part of his ritual of mourning for a deceased grandparent. He had taken it in stride. Anyway, one day midway through the school year, our teacher, with the self-satisfaction that she was embarking on a great leap for mankind, announced to the class that we had a new classmate. "He is a new student," she told us as if we would have not already known that, and she hoped we would make him feel welcome. "His name is Robbie. Everyone say hello to Robbie."

He had been standing off to her side, near the door. I hadn't noticed him until then...or maybe I did. Those particulars are gone from this memory. But the truth of the moment, regardless of factual accuracy, is that I did not notice him until she asked us to greet him. Either way, there he was, in all his black glory, carrying within his skin color an immediate cachet, not exactly of danger, but nevertheless capable of eliciting fear in his small dark frame. He was all I hoped to be.

I immediately befriended him, took him under my wing in this bleached school. I would be his guide; he would be my teacher of truth. That first week, we spoke of rap music, of dancing, of guns. I told him of my "gat," a twenty-two caliber revolver my father, in a pique of right-wing fervor, had purchased for me a few years prior: a western-style revolver. I had pleaded with him to buy it for me (It had been during a brief period of fascination with western movies-more specifically the Young Guns franchise). I, of course, withheld that last bit of information from Robbie. It was sufficient that he know of its dangerous existence, yet be unaware of its origin.

He then told me of his piece, a .357 revolver. I was in awe. A .357.

As he described it, this was a real street gun, more suited to a low-slung waistband than the long leather holster of my pistol. I thought of crime, of dark streets and desperation, of evading the stroboscopic orbs of a police cruiser. It was a beautiful fantasy that flittered before my mind.

I invited him to my house for Friday night, with his promise that he would invite me to his house the following evening. My father picked us up in his minivan. My mother bought us chips and soda from the grocery store. We would have pizza delivered, that delicacy so essential to a successful sleepover. We barricaded ourselves in my room, blared rap music from my shelf stereo system that I had rigged with larger speakers taken from an old record player. I proudly displayed my revolver. He seemed oddly quiet as I showed him how the cylinder spun when the hammer was half-cocked, how the bullets were loaded, how I could spin it on my finger like a cowboy. I thought he was disappointed, knowing at his house he had a .357. My little revolver seemed puny in comparison. I was humiliated.

I soon put the gun away. We practiced dancing, whatever moves were currently in vogue on Yo! MTV Raps. Those too are lost to me now. It is probably best that way, to save myself the embarrassment of having to relieve them through recollection. What I do remember is what he told me when we had finished dancing: That was the best dancing he had ever seen a white boy do. I beamed, basking in the compliment. I might not have been able to undo my skin color, but I could rise above it.

We spent the evening as children of that age are wont to do, watching television and rented movies (I forgot to mention that we had also rented movies on the ride home), eating junk food, and otherwise entertaining ourselves through humor and conversation. Silly things that do not linger long in the memory. Golden and corrupted youth.

The next day, as promised, we were driven in my father's van to Robbie's house. It was small inside and dimly lit, low hung ceilings lacking a second story. I remember his mother as a blur behind the bedroom door as she greeted us, friendly but distant. We retreated to his room. The lights seem in my memory to never be lit, only a crooked little glow trailing in through the slanted blinds of his window. His room lacked a stereo, most of its small space taken up with a massive aged bed. I can still remember that bed, its chipped and dented frame, its sagging mattress, his dresser the same broken and stained wood. There was no adventure here; all seemed shabby and dull, as weary and

trampled as his mattress.

In hushed tone, I asked him about his gun. He retrieved it from his dresser drawer, hesitating as he held it in his hand and staring at it as if waiting for some answer to announce itself from within. Then he handed it to me. I took it cautiously, this communion, preparing to ascend to the next tier of initiation into his culture. I realized instantly why he had been so unsure of himself while handling my gun. This “gun,” his gun, was primarily plastic, cheap black paint covering the only metal on it, scratches revealing its cloudy tin frame. I looked at him. He would not meet my eyes. He stared at his tennis shoes, standing there in his murky room, and said to me “I thought you were always just talking about BB guns. That’s all I have.”

I do not remember the rest of the evening. I assume we had pizza, that seems to be a universal, but I cannot recall what we did or said for that foggy remnant of an evening. I only remember a quiet shame and humiliation underlying our discourse, a distance that had only now been recognized by the both of us. Neither of us belonged where we were. I looked forward to leaving the next morning.

Robbie did not stay long at our school. He was gone before the year ended, under what circumstances I cannot say or would even wish to conjecture. It seems he was there for a few weeks and then simply dissipated from our world. . . . I do not know if I even noticed his absence. He arrived on a pedestal of my preconceived notions and left tarnished to my eyes, his small dark frame portending no danger. Just small and dark, no more dangerous than his BB gun. A toy.

As high school approached, I eventually moved on to other subcultures. Hippies. New clothes, new music, new drugs, even a new vernacular. The transition was only a matter of embellishment. You see, for rats like me, it’s not hard to reinvent yourself. After all, I am a child of suburbia, the second generation of a generation that abandoned the sinking ship, without foundation, without culture, without self. For those like me, the perennial question was and still remains: What is identity when you have no identity?



FORGOTTEN PASSTIME

Digital Photography
S.D. Lintz

AUTO-DA-FE

Thomas Olges

It's their eyes that get him.

Red-rimmed and puffy. Exhausted, circled with drooping crescent moons. Bracketed with beetle-bright bands of tear-melted make-up. Always the same dull sheen. Strain. Urgency. Desperation.

Thomas's hands go to his throat, check the composure of his collar. It's immaculate, of course, as it was a minute ago when he left the parish bathroom. He's ready—as ready as he can be. He heaves a sigh, checks the clock above the refrigerator.

10:05. Just under 30 minutes to the service. 10 before he should be there to meet mourners. Enough time for another round of trials.

Thomas takes a worn red notebook down from the shelf beside the stove, thumbs it unerringly open to its last filled page. There's a table there, meticulously inked over the paper's rules in his own hand. He follows a column of cramped figures to its first blank entry, pens in the numbers for the next trial. 90 seconds. 300°, 325°, 350°, 375°. He begins turning on burners.

Their losses are just so naked. After the wailing and the sobbing—when the show is over—all there is to see is the emptiness that's left behind. Bleary eyes, vacant and hungry, gaping at him like pairs of open manholes.

They want something from him, something they can use to fill that awful void. Hope, or reassurance: some hint of a greater purpose to the hell they're going through.

And all he can do is stand there *talking*.

Thomas sets a kitchen timer for three minutes, pulls a package of tortillas down from the cupboard. He removes four, separating them carefully to avoid tearing, and deals them out clockwise onto the bright red burners. He stares fixedly forward.

When the timer hits the 90 second mark, Thomas turns each tortilla over in the same clockwise order in which they were originally distributed. He still doesn't look; examination has to wait until the trial is finished.

He needs a token to give to the grieving, to remind them that they're remembered and beloved. A tacit affirmation of the justice and order they've always thought was secretly at work in the world. Something better than *words*.

The timer beeps, and Thomas takes the tortillas off their burners. He takes them to the window and holds them up, one at a time, in the light of the mid-morning sunshine. His eyes rove over them, studying every caramel-colored swirl or blackened burn mark with the slow precision of a jewel-cutter.

Nothing. No smiling saviors, no beatific virgins, not even the dim outline of a cross. He swallows a lump of bitter disappointment, steels his resolve. He'll have to make do with words another day.

Sighing, Thomas puts away his supplies. It's not hopeless; some of today's tortillas had a promising mix of color and shape—his times and temperatures are close to correct. He has to fine-tune the numbers. He'll have his token if he keeps trying.

He just has to have faith.

EARLY

Thomas Olges

Since we met, it's always been the same
start to the day. Through the blackout

blinds, creeping sunlight sneaks a peek
at our lazy love. We groan, and break

the crescent moon cuddle. Lathering, brushing,
spraying, shaving, and smoothing ensue. My hair,

dark tendrils adulterating the shining white
tile of his bathroom floor, makes him cringe,

but with affection in his frown. Through the haze
of hairspray he asks how much longer. I promise

thirty minutes. He sits staring at the t.v., quiet,
even though it has been over an hour.

LOVE IS ALL THAT WE'LL EVER HAVE

Brandon Stettenbenz

Arms sweeter
Than Death
Enclosing this
Stolen moment
From time's
Freight-steady
Deliverance

Life screaming
Passion burning
In the waters
Of her infinite iris
Clenched muscle
Pounding blood
Glorious symphony
Rising to crescendo

The infinite
Cosmos reverberate
As pulsing stars
Expend their light
Achieving everything
Touching truth
Wielding life
In the soft
Sweat of
Penultimate
Sin

THE SNOW PILLARS

Wes Allen Smallwood

“There’s someone out there.”

Steve squinted at the digital alarm clock before him. The display was bright, and the sight of it gave him a quick and sharp pain in his head. He rolled over and looked at her curved shape filling the light of the window in their bedroom. To any stranger, she would be a vision. To him, she was more.

He had to look away.

“Beth, there’s nobody out there. It’s 3:15, honey, why don’t you come to bed?”

She continued to stare out the window, shifting blinds up and down, failing miserably at her attempts to be discreet. “Can’t sleep,” was all she allowed, her attention monopolized so.

“Your back still hurt?”

“Sort of aches,” she replied, still transfixed, “but I’m okay.”

He leaned up on his elbow and allowed his eyes to adjust, the stark contrast of the light outside and the darkness inside their home giving him odd flashes of color about the room. He started to make out the details of her back, the way her skin was lit so softly by the reflection of the light in the snow. *So beautiful.*

“Is it still coming down?”

“Yeah, you should see it. Your car’s completely covered. I’m not sure you’ll be able to get out in the morning.”

“It *is* the morning, and if it’s still falling I don’t think anyone’s going to be out and about tomorrow.”

She turned her head and caught his eye over her shoulder, her expression tightening with worry. “Do you think they’ll call?”

His eyes drifted to the dresser. The television had gone dark hours ago, but he stared at it without focus, pondering his response to what should be the simplest of questions.

You’re hesitating.

He looked quickly into her eyes--those frightened, blazing eyes--and muttered something that was more truthful than he’d anticipated. “I don’t know...”

Beth nodded and looked back out the window, back to work with the blinds.

Be quicker, Steve. Quick, quick, quick, come on.

“But,” he dawdled on the vowel, stretching it out and letting her see how full of confidence it was, “you’re not doing anybody any good staying up all hours.”

He swung his legs over the side of the bed and half-walked, half-stumbled

through the room over to her.

He could smell her from where he was, but the intensity of it filled him up as he moved. She always did make his job easy. He slid his arms around hers and cupped his hands under her belly. He craned his head down to kiss her neck, but she twisted away. Their eyes met for a moment, but she turned back to the window.

They stood together, and looked out into the darkness.

“See? Right over there.” She pointed her finger out near the mailbox, which should have been brick but in the aimless cascade of white might as well have been an upturned teacup. “Right by the car.”

Steve squinted and stared, but saw nothing but the bespeckled blackness of night. He kissed her on the back of the head and spoke quietly, “Nobody’s out there, sweetie. It’s just the light over the hedge. Come on, let’s go to bed.”

Twisting the blinds shut, he led her back to bed. Beth lay silently still against his chest, the warmth of her calming him while he stroked her hair and stared up at the stucco ceiling.

Beth ran her fingers through the thick tuft of his chest, occasionally scratching with her long fingernails. “Do you want to talk, Steven?”

He stopped petting for a moment and took a deep breath, untwisting his spine in the process. “Not ‘til we have something to talk about. Go to sleep.” He kissed her head and they made their last shift before falling asleep.

There were no lights on the ceiling that night, no faint barks in the distance. Had she stayed awake, the silence would have been deafening.

...looking at getting through all of this by Tuesday, but I know what you're asking, Connie. How are we looking this fine Friday morning? Well, it's not good, I'll tell you that. The snowfall that started yesterday afternoon is continuing at least through tomorrow and possibly as late as Sunday evening, with some areas already reporting as much as sixteen inches of snow—

The television chattered on thoughtlessly as Steve looked down at the pile of wooden planks and mantles in his living room. He grimaced at the old brass hinges and rods, the battered brackets and something he was certain should be called a *heretofore*. This is how Noah must have felt, drunk and stumbling through a wood, trying to figure out what an ark was. He thought of Bill Cosby’s old “what’s a cubit” routine, and allowed himself a cautious chortle. When the reality came, it came in waves; and the laughter in his head became somber and soon all that was left was a sigh.

They had only moved in a month ago, against the better wishes of their doctor. The home was new, but some amenities had been stripped or unfinished during the housing market crash, so there was still plenty to do. He stared at his tools, a few older pieces his dad had given to him years ago and a boxed set of monochromatic everyday utensils in a light blue plastic case that

screamed bargain bin. He set to work, fitting pieces together and working out his plan of attack. After realizing he'd been staring at the same piece for seven minutes, he decided to take a break.

"I'm sorry, but that toolkit your mom got us sucks," he declared as he purposefully walked across the kitchen towards the fridge.

"Don't look a gift horse in the mouth," Beth replied, battling last night's dinner plates with a coarse towel, trying to keep the bandage on her left wrist as dry as possible. "Are you not going in to work today?"

"No, I already called Terry. I never got that phrase. If the Trojans had looked in the horse's mouth, they'd have known that the Greeks were coming and could have saved me countless boring hours of reading in high school." He had poured himself a glass of orange juice and rested it against his stomach while he spoke, trying not to focus on the bandaged hand and the cold stares he remembered from the paramedics.

"Well, that'll be nice. I could use you around here today." She sauntered over to him, tossing her dish towel on the island. She kissed him on the lips--hard, like cracking flint--and turned without looking at him. "And that's not why they call it that."

As she walked out, he couldn't help but wonder how she was able to be so nonchalant. *Would they call?*

She poked her head back around the door frame, more solemn than she had been all morning. "If you get time, would you mind fixing up the banister?"

He swallowed hard, but managed to clear his throat before answering. "Yeah, uh, yeah, I can do that. Sorry."

Steve passed his pile of parts and walked to the stair. He took the steps slowly, suddenly very aware of how high they were from the floor. He felt a chill from the air outside and the shock of it shook his balance. He felt his stomach tighten. He was sick and scared and a cold sweat came over his entire body, making the fabric of his jeans feel suddenly loose and uncomfortable. He carefully descended the steps, back to where his tools lay spread out on the carpet. He grabbed a blue plastic screwdriver and a baggie from the hardware store and called upstairs. "Beth? Honey?"

"Yeah?" she called back, apparently from their bedroom.

"Is it okay if I go ahead and put the switch plates up in the kitchen first?"

He waited for an answer, but heard nothing.

"Honey?"

"Yeah?"

"Do you care if I--"

"Do whatever you want, Steven."

He thought of calling back to her, as a man does when he's unsure of what has just transpired, but certain he's made a mistake. He took a step up the stair

and stood a moment, staring blankly and breathing stupidly with his mouth open. The snow fell softly outside, making the tiniest tapping sound against the windows in the room. Behind him the storm roared, playing out its silent warfare against the thin glass panes he foolishly thought would protect him. Ahead of him was Beth, quiet and alone somewhere upstairs.

He took another step and reached out for the railing. It pulled freely from the wall and the stripped drywall behind it bore the holes of his failure. He placed it back against the wall and turned back, down the steps toward the bathroom and the great fury outside.

That night he gazed up at his stucco ceiling. Beth lay asleep on her back, as comfortable as she could be. The coolness of the air outside tiptoed between them and made its bed. That night he would dream of great valleys and multicolored birds with iridescent wings flying over them.

That night he would awake in a pool of sweat, his nightmares haunted by the sounds of wings beating against the sky and the plummeting cries of hummingbirds.

The heat kicked on loud and sharp Saturday afternoon and Steve found himself sitting on the toilet lid, staring at the floor. Looking up from the tiles to the unpainted walls, a cold chill shook him from his reverie. *How long have I been in here?* He hit the button on his cell phone next to the baggie of parts and read the time. “No way,” he commented aloud, the quirky echo of the new resonating in the walls of his bathroom.

He hated this. If there was ever a commonality with Steven and Beth, it was a certain amount of directness when it came to the relationship. If he had something to talk about, he’d just say it. And *vice versa*. They never left anything unsaid.

Things change.

Steve wasn’t sure if he was angry at the thought itself or himself for having it, but he felt his skin getting hot over it. He walked out the door and into the hall, tripping up on a piece of loose carpet before coming to the edge of the living room.

He could see her head lying at the end of the couch, and at first mistook her for being asleep, but she dashed this with a sharp yet deliberately quiet snarl into her phone.

“No, Mom, no! That’s not how it is.” He held back and listened. “Because I’m not discussing it with you, that’s why.” He felt that tightening sickness again in his stomach, the harshness of it compounded by the fact that without saying it, he knew she was talking about him.

Her voice became quieter then, barely more than a whisper.

“I don’t know. He won’t talk to me. I don’t know if he doesn’t care or... I don’t know.” She picked at the fringe of a pillow rested on her belly, raised



SPINNINGFIRE

Digital Photography
S.D. Lintz

almost to her face. "I don't know, Mom. I've got my hand wrapped up and my ankle hurts a bit to walk on."

He raised his feet softly and leaned his back against the wall in a crouch. Here so close, he wanted to be strong for her. He wanted to be good and honest, but seemed to have forgotten how. Helplessness crept under his skin like a cold breeze and sent him into a fit of nausea. Steve sat and listened in the hallway and could see her trying to shift her weight.

Beth turned toward the back of the couch, placing the pillow beneath her belly and burying her head against the cushions. Steve stood and looked on as the fabric around her face began to dampen, quiet as snowfall. She sobbed, and his heart sank as she continued.

"I'm scared, Mom. I can't feel the baby kicking."

* * *

The air had gone still. Beth awoke and glanced about the room, the confusion and mild anger of one being unexpectedly awakened coming over. She was looking for Steven's alarm when it occurred to her. Steven was gone. She slid on her slippers, fumbling in the darkness but aided by that strange light emanating from outside the window. She sat for a moment at the edge of the bed. She didn't like that odd light, like it was pulling the definition from the room, siphoning it out for its own cruel uses.

She sat there a while, absently rubbing her belly, full and seemingly quiet. Her back ached more than she remembered. She wondered if it had hurt this bad all along, how she couldn't have noticed before. She wondered about Steven. Where was he? If she opened his closet, would she find his suitcase and nicest suits missing, socks and sweats strewn about in a fury? Could she blame him? How is anyone supposed to wait for an answer like this? Wasn't it enough not to hear a heartbeat? Christ, how much more can we take? She leaned forward, trying to peek out the window, hindered by her paunch. She stood and walked slowly, awkwardly, to the seal of the window. She put her hand on the frame and closed her eyes.

What would she do if his car was gone? Who was she without her Steven? She felt her eyes water, sickened at the thought and trying desperately to strike it from her mind. She gathered herself and raised her head, eyes closed like a newborn. Opening them slowly, all she could see was white. Some shapes and, heart sinking at the sight, tracks on the road. Beth tried focusing, the light still playing tricks with her eyes when she caught it: the bumper of Steven's Buick, the rusty old bucket, gleaming in the moonlight.

She felt more relieved than she'd ever been, but felt the uncontrollable urge to cry. She let out a whimper and wept in her own hands, not understanding for a moment why she was doing it. "Thank you. Oh God, thank you."

When she reached the stair wrapped in a blanket, she thought she could see someone out the front windows. As she inched closer, she saw the shape of

a man, bare-backed and somewhat lean, and inside her home. Beth knew his back, better than she liked of late. She moved toward him, reaching out her hand for purchase and finding the railing. She was shocked to find it holding strong, held fast to the wall with brass fittings and extra mountings for security. The rail felt smooth and strong in her hand, and she relished the feeling of it as her hand slid down.

Half-way down the stair, he spoke to her.

“How are you?” The way he spoke gave her a chill, as if he was passing an acquaintance at work whose name he had never bothered to learn. She had to respond.

“I’m okay.”

He let out a sigh as he spoke. “Good.”

She took him in, framed in the light of the windows. The blue-handled tools in his hands shone like lightning bugs, catching the moonlight as his hands shook. She looked further down and saw his feet and pant legs soaked with water, and a faded trail heading toward the back door.

“It’s stopped snowing.”

She looked up and saw that it was true. The stillness outside almost made her lose her balance, like something was amiss in the world around her. Her balance came back, but that feeling held tightly.

“I thought about leaving, you know.” His hands still shaking, he stared hard into the darkness. “I thought about leaving and getting in the car, and driving, and just leaving. I don’t know what I’m doing here, Beth. I don’t know what’s going on or who we are and I don’t know what else I can do.”

She stared at him and her eyes began to fill again, the contours of his back becoming memories. She batted her eyes to get the tears to fall, to just get them *out*. She wanted to speak, but still had no words. The stair had taken them.

But then he turned. He turned and looked her hard in the eye for the first time in as many days. He turned and she knew he was speaking to her. Not to some co-worker whose name was lost in the useless wastes of his mind. He was speaking to *her*. To his Beth.

“But there’s nobody out there.” He was speaking quietly now, as if more than a whisper would shatter the glass around him and the world outside would be in again. She almost longed for it. “There’s nobody out there for me. All I am is in this house, in this *goddamn* house,” his tears ran down his face and onto his chest. “And in you. But oh God, Beth, I’m scared to death that I’ve lost you. I’ve lost you and I’ve lost myself and I don’t know what to do.”

He fell to his knees and wept, the gut-wrenching sobs and deep wails that one reserves for childhood, when every shred of grief is all that you are in the moment you have it. He looked to her now like a marionette after the show, bobbing slightly but with no real life. She watched him and knew that her grief had its match and that this wasn’t it for them.

She ran down the steps, damn the rail, and threw her blanket around the both of them. She held him in her arms and they rocked. They rocked and rocked and cried and loved. For the first time in days, they loved.

“I’m so sorry, Beth. I’m so sorry about the banister. I’m so scared. I’m scared that I...that our poor Lea. I--”

She shushed him and rocked, and her heart broke for the millionth time these few days. “Steve, baby, I’m scared, too,” she sobbed. “I haven’t,” she started, trying and failing to choke back her tears, “I haven’t felt her kick and it all feels so wrong. Oh, God, Steven, they couldn’t hear her heartbeat. What did I do to our baby?”

“I should have been here. The rail should have been fixed and I should have been here and, and my Lea. Beth, our little Lea...” They held each other close, for fear that letting go would be letting it all go forever. They rocked and swayed and fell and slept. The scene outside had lost its luster from the day, and the urgent and inherent danger of snow was laid bare in the contrast of the night. In place of the pile of wooden planks and mantles was an assembled infant’s cradle. It was all he could do.

The appointment was still two days away. The quiet in the room was bearable.

SMOKE AND MIRRORS

Karyl-Anne Geary

I used to spend hours staring at you in the moonlight—
the way the faint celestial glow worked with the glowing ember
to hide the shadows you lived behind
and illuminated with clarity
all I wanted to see.
I never minded the harshness of smoke when it was yours—
I hid my coughs, swallowed my throat's scratches,
and embraced its bitter scent
as part of you.
I still remember lying beside you,
breathing returning to normal,
as my fingers traced and parted the bristles of your bare chest,
dreading your need for smoke,
but looking forward to dressing for the crisp night air
so I could hide in my darkness
and study your softness
in the moon's muted glow.



TOO MUCH POP

Drawing
Gilbert Garcil

**LANGUAGE SO HARD YOU COULD
BLUDGEON ME WITH IT**

Wes Allen Smallwood

Perhaps the most sophisticated
of writing styles, I've
ever struggled with
the poem—such profundity in so few words. I
realize that structure is a necessary evil, but
you have to admit that even a well-built room can be stifling.

PLANTING SEASON

Jon Carson

Hot wind blew grit through the holes in the thick thatch of the hut. Night had finally come again after the long, hot day. The temperature began to drop as the sun slipped past the horizon, bringing relief and the breeze. Without any food to eat, we all retired to our huts earlier than normal. We used to gather two or three families on a compound and sit around the fire. We would talk about what happened that day, and the other children and I would run around and play games. Sometimes, we caught frogs and played with them, poking them with sticks and watching their eyes bulge out of their heads. My brother stuck his stick right through the frog once and carried it around, wagging it in the girls' faces. The frog was still croaking for a while before it finally died.

But there was no gathering tonight. We hadn't built a fire because we had no food to cook. Mother said we were conserving wood to last until the crops started growing. I hoped that time would come soon. I hadn't eaten anything in three days. We had some milk yesterday, milked from the last heifer in our herd. My stomach grumbled at the thought of food.

"I'll go to town tomorrow and look for work," I heard my father say as he stooped to enter the hut. Mother followed him.

"The town is a half day's walk from here. You won't make it home by nightfall," she said, her voice worried.

"I know. I will stay in town a few days and try to make enough money to buy a few days food."

My mother sighed, the burden on her shoulders pressing down on her lungs and forcing the air out. "I'm worried, Rebo. The children are getting weak. What if the rain doesn't come?"

"The rain will come, Zahara. It always does. We just have to wait."

The hut was dark, the blackness thick as cow's blood, but I knew my father had wrapped his arms around my mother. Like my father's arms, the darkness wrapped itself around me, and I fell asleep.

“Sabou, Sabou, wake up! The white people are coming!”

I rolled over and peeked at my brother.

“I hear the truck. The anasara are coming! Maybe they will bring food!”

My empty stomach flipped at the word “food.” I jumped up and beat my brother out of the hut. Just coming over the ridge of the hill was the white truck that the missionaries drove. Their cots rumbled in the back of the truck. They would be staying overnight. That meant they would be cooking. We would eat tonight.

As the truck approached our compound, I watched Aishatu steer between our fields, careful not to drive over the millet seeds still hiding their sprouts beneath the sand. Aishatu is the Fulani name my mother gave her. Sometimes, I wonder what her white name is.

“Sabou, put on your shirt!” Mother yelled at me. Usually, we didn’t bother with our clothes, especially in the hot season. But whenever the white people came around, we always had to put on our shirts. I dashed back to the hut and found my only shirt—a blue shirt with holes in it. I pulled it over my head and ran back outside just in time to meet the white people as they got out of the truck.

Aishatu started talking with my grandfather. He was saying something about the millet and how we were starving.

“Me nana beldum,” I heard her say, over and over. I knew that she wouldn’t be happy about millet. She had helped us plant it many weeks ago, and still no green had sprouted from the ground.

I felt a hand on my head, and turned to see Bintu standing over me. Aishatu’s friend came with her every week and worked with the women in our village. Aishatu was teaching my father and the other men how to read, but Bintu was teaching the women about what it meant to follow Isa. I listened to the stories Bintu told, and watched as she acted out some of them. This Isa man seemed like a very strong man. Bintu once told a story about how Isa took five loaves of bread and two fish and fed over five thousand people. I don’t know what a fish is, but I do know that those people weren’t hungry anymore after they met Isa. That story is my favorite.

“No chomre?” Bintu asked.

“Chomre wala,” I answered, telling her the work was fine. We continued through the traditional Fulani greetings. Bintu asked how was my family? the cattle? the sun? the wind? I gave all the right

answers, knowing that once the greetings were over the truth about the millet would be told.

Suddenly, I felt a sharp snap against my back. I turned and saw Rano running away from me with a palm frond, laughing. I took off after him and chased him to the tree. He climbed up to escape from me, and dropped the palm frond as he climbed. I picked it up and ran to the open hut where we met for church. Aishatu and two of my uncles and my grandfather had already gathered under the hut.

“Toy Rebo?” Aishatu asked where my father was.

“He has gone to town. He and my brothers are looking for work.” My uncle Lawali told her. I watched as she frowned.

“Is this all then?” she asked, wondering if any more men would be coming to reading lessons.

“They are all in town,” my uncle told her.

Aishatu sighed. She said something in her language, then pulled the white stick from her bag and began to draw on the black board. I reached for the white stick, and Aishatu gave me a small piece and the little black board. I began to draw as my uncles began to say the letters Aishatu pointed at.

I spent the afternoon running between the two groups, listening to Bintu’s stories and drawing on the black board. Bintu was talking about how Isa had stopped a storm once. My mother watched closely as Bintu told the story. When Bintu was finished, she asked if the women understood.

“I do not,” my mother said. “If this Isa can stop a storm, can Isa also start a storm?” I could hear the hope in my mother’s voice.

“Yes, Isa is the Son of God,” Bintu told my mother. “He has the power of creation, and can control the storms, among other things.”

“Then why will Isa not send us rain?” my mother asked, distraught.

“I do not know the ways of God,” Bintu answered. “God will send rain when it is time for rain.”

My mother did not like this answer. “You told us that if we believed in Isa, then we would not have to worry. But we said that we believed, and here we have no food. Maybe if I had never said I believed in your god, then my god would have been merciful and sent us rain for our millet to grow.”

I looked at Bintu. It was clear that she didn’t like this statement from my mother. She sat quietly for a moment, then spoke.

“Zahara, I did not say that following Isa, the one true God, would

be easy and make all your troubles go away. What I meant was that you would not have to worry about life and death, because if you serve Isa, you will spend eternity in heaven. I do not know why it is not raining. But I do have faith that God will send rain before it is too late.”

My mother still did not like this answer. She got up and went to our hut. Taking the empty water jug from inside the door, she started walking off toward the well. She walked stiffly, balancing the heavy jug on her head. She was upset with the white people, but she would fetch water for them. The white people are too weak to carry the water themselves, but they will need it to cook tonight. Mother may be mad, but she was hungry, too.

After a while, Aishatu packed up her white sticks and books, and she and Bintu began to unload the truck. They pulled their cots off the back, and Rano and I raced to help. We set up the cots for them, and I watched as Bintu began to prepare for dinner. Aishatu had walked off to a hut, and I heard her asking for a clean pot to cook in. My aunt found the pot and began washing it with water from her *londeh*. Bintu started to mix a strange powder into her water that turned it yellow. I do not know why she always does this, but she let's me have the shiny silver paper when it is empty, and I lick the sweet powder off the sides. Today, the treat is more of a taunt to my empty stomach that growls as I swallow the sweetness. It wants more than a taste of food.

My mother comes out of our hut and begins to build a fire for Aishatu. I hear them laughing together.

“I must watch you closely as you cook, Aishatu,” my mother says.

“I can cook, Zahara.”

“I know you can cook, but you cannot keep a fire going. If I do not sit with you, you will have no fire to cook over.”

Aishatu laughed with my mother, shaking her finger like a Fulani would. She is learning fast to be like us. But she never really will be—not until she knows the pain of waiting.

I sit by the fire and watch as Aishatu dumps rice into the boiling water. She opens three cans of tomato paste and adds them to the rice. Ripping off the sharp lids, she hands the cans over to my brother, sister, and me. Greedily, we lick into the cans, letting the dark red paste seep into our tongues like blood into the dry ground.

Soon, people from other compounds in my village began to wander near the fire. The smell of the fire must have carried on the breeze, and signaled that food was being prepared. As the rice cooked, the crowd

grew. I heard whispers about how the white people were going to give us food so we wouldn't be hungry anymore. I thought of how nice it would be to be able to eat something every day until the millet grew. My stomach cringed at the thought of being so full.

The rice came off the fire soon after people had arrived. The mothers came close to Aishatu to receive food for their family. Trying to be fair, Aishatu spooned rice into the bowls of the different families. Many women complained that someone else had gotten more than she had, or that she had more kids to feed and needed more rice. But the rice was gone before long, the pot scraped clean. Aishatu filled the pot with water and set it on the embers, letting it soak to be cleaned. She had taken no rice for herself.

“Sabou, come.”

The voice of my mother called me to our hut, where she scooped a handful of hot rice into my cupped, dirty hands. I looked at the meager amount, and thought of the story of Isa. The bag of rice Aishatu had poured into the pot had not been very big—no bigger than a mound of dung. But she had scooped out enough that every family that had come had received some rice. I started to think that Isa had taken care of us after all.

I ate my rice slowly, enjoying the feeling of the hot food sinking into my stomach and filling it. I knew when I was finished eating that Mother would send me to bed. I made the handful of rice last as long as possible, then retired into our hut, hoping the white people would stay another night.

I woke to shouts the next morning. Coming out of the hut, I saw my mother and a few other mothers talking heatedly with the white women by their truck. It looked as if the white women had packed up and were leaving. I ran over to the truck, hoping this wasn't true.

“You must give us food. You are white, we know you have it.”

“We do not have any food to give.”

“You are lying. You have food in your town.”

“Yes, we do. But we cannot give the food to you. We told you we were here to tell you about Isa. You knew that from the beginning. We told you we could not build wells or give you medicine or feed you. That is not what we do. We are missionaries, not aid workers.”

I didn't really understand what was going on, but I could tell that my mother was angry.

“If you will not give us food, and your god will not give us rain,



EYES WIDE SHUT DIPTYCH

Painting
Rebeka Trapp

then you will not be welcome here.”

Surprised, I looked at my mother. Surely, she would not send these white people away. They always brought food when they came, and they were teaching us new things about God and how to read. They were kind to us. She could not send them away.

“Zahara, do not send us away. We want to help, but we cannot. We cannot feed a village.”

“Then leave.”

My mother was going crazy. Shocked, I ran around the back of the truck and climbed into it. My mother and the white women argued for a little longer, but my mother finally got her way. The white women finished packing up the truck.

“Sabou, it is time for us to leave. You must get out.”

“I will see you in seven days?” I asked, already knowing the answer.

“I do not know, Sabou. We want to return. We will see.” Aishatu lifted me from the truck and squeezed me tightly in a white ritual she called a hug. “I will remember you,” she said, and put me down on the ground.

The truck started with a bang, and drove off the compound, carefully avoiding the millet fields. I waved goodbye with my whole arm, knowing I may never see the white women again. I was sad. I wanted to know more about the Isa man.

The day dragged on after the white women left. I helped my mother get water from the well, and took a nap up in the tree in the afternoon. Just before sunset, Rano and I were playing up on the ridge when we felt the first drops. We looked up at the sky to see that the sinking sun had pulled clouds over head. The wind picked up and blew the dirt across the field. Sand pelted my bare skin, stinging my back and arms.

“We must get home,” Rano shouted.

Knowing he was right, we took off across the field, racing the dust storm back to our hut. We dashed inside just as the thick cloud descended over our compound. The hut sifted the sand through the small holes in the thatch. The covering Mother had put over the londoh blew off, exposing the water. I quickly covered it back up, knowing a trip to the well right after the storm would be hard in the muddied sand. As quickly as it had begun, the sand storm stopped, and the rain began to pour down onto our hut. Glad for the opened skies, Rano and I ran out of the hut into the fields. We danced in the rain, enjoying

the first bath we had had in many weeks. The rain poured down from the sky and soaked the ground, urging the millet to grow. But this was only the first rain of the season. It would take many more rains before our millet was ready to harvest. If father did not return with food, we would be going hungry again for many more days. But I knew that this rain was a blessing. I thought about how Bintu had said that Isa could make it rain when he wanted to.

Mother came up behind me and put her hand on my shoulder.

“Your father will be home tomorrow. He will bring millet from town. We will make chewtum, and you will eat. This is a time for praise.”

I turned around to look at my mother as she walked away from me.

“It is good that we sent the white people away. Now we have rain. God is not angry with us anymore.”

She had not spoken to me, but I had heard what she said. But if Isa was the one true God, as Bintu had said, who had made the rain?

THE WEIGHT OF OUR SPACE SUITS

John Scott Brewer

I have been pinned down by the moon who
rests
in that way that is not resting
seated and firm in firmament
infirm only to poetry that demands constant illumination
constant spark

I am beholden to those tread marks
and that spider shadow cast off from our short
moments of clarity and force
when gunslingers ruled
tyrants wore mustaches that denoted their villainy
people made waffles and wore socks

I am beaten into this earth by the image
the men, almost toys against the dark blanket
scattered galaxy dusting of lights behind
the motherly blue curve rising
falling
for one side
the side with sad boot prints in the lunar regolith
forgotten paper boats after a summer storm drove us back indoors
whispering their own odysseys to one another

SPLITTING HAIRS

Chelsea Beville

is like the time when,
shivering and drenched in rain,
you turned to me and said
You're like a wet blanket,
I can't breathe.

I can't breathe.
I don't know why you decided
to call it quits after taking me
to dinner, insisting we walk,
not bothering to gauge the weather.

The sky opened up and fell on
the three blocks back to my house,
us melting into the storm drains,
walking because running would
have saved us time but not comfort.

You wouldn't let me unlock the door
but held a dripping newspaper overhead
so you couldn't be sure if
it was newsprint or mascara
escaping down my face

MAKING OF A TIN MAN

Charles Blake Oliver

Friends surround me in the darkness. I look but don't see what they are holding. Pain strikes my body again and again. It only adds to what is already there. I'm heavier than what I thought I could be. It's an effort to move. But my friends are there; they lift me up. They lay me on my back so I'll be comfortable.

You're gone so I don't fight when they bring out the blowtorch. It's hard to imagine they know what they're doing. It hurts but it's helping. I think. Even if not, it's the thought that counts.

They don't leave until their job is done. They promise to check on me later. But they still leave. They couldn't stay forever. I lift my head and my neck whines. My back is almost too stiff to move. I get to my feet creaking, squeaking, and squealing all the way.

I don't recognize the shape in the mirror. I reflect the light from the window. I stare into myself. It helps. But metal doesn't smile.

FLY

Charles Blake Oliver

Few people told him he was crazy. Most just nervously chuckled before taking a drink. Everyone changed the subject. The fact was that Tom thought his son, Sam, could fly. He couldn't explain why he thought this. Tom had never seen his son do it. Sam had no wings to speak of, other than the water variety. Perhaps God had come to him in the night and Tom couldn't remember. But, as sure as Tom knew he needed oxygen, he knew his son could fly.

His wife had been asleep for an hour. Both of their children had been down for longer. Tom tossed and turned, thinking he just wasn't comfortable. Ten minutes went by. Perhaps it was the summer heat seeping through the walls of their home. Another ten minutes went by. Maybe he was hungry. A snack would cure his problem, surely.

Tom moved as slowly and silently as he could. He was almost to the door when he heard, "Where are you going?"

"Go back to sleep, Margaret," Tom whispered, "I'm just going to the kitchen."

"Don't be up too late," she said as her shadow turned over, "Remember what we have to do tomorrow?"

He couldn't. She would have to tell him when he woke up, assuming he ever got to sleep. Tom went out into the hallway as quietly as he could. In the bedroom he had the dim light of the street lamp in front of the next house to see. Now there was darkness. He rested his hand against the wall as he walked toward the stairs. A little light was by where the stairs started, filtering out from underneath Sam's door.

He resisted the idea of looking in on his son, making his way down the stairs to where he could safely turn on a light. If he had wanted to go to sleep, the blinding white light didn't help. He blinked hard as he headed to the kitchen, on his mission to find a suitable snack. Nothing that didn't require cooking in the cupboard. A few expired sweets in the cabinets. Ice cream in the freezer. Out of all his options, ice cream certainly seemed the best. He spooned several scoops out for himself before going into the living room. The first time he told Sam he could fly they were eating ice cream a few weeks before.

Margaret had just left the room to go put their daughter, Suzie, in

her crib. Tom had been making three bowls and Sam asked why he got so much less. At first, Tom told his son that it was because he was only five years old. Sam scowled at this. He hated being told he couldn't do things because of his age. After a moment of thinking, Tom added, "It's also bad for flying."

"Flying?" Sam asked.

"Didn't you know you could fly?" Tom asked him. Sam's mouth and eyes went wide. If Sam didn't know before, he knew then.

Tom smiled as he thought about how cute his wife thought it was when Sam told her he could fly. She didn't understand that Sam was telling her the truth. Tom went to the living room and started to flip through channels, trying to see if anything was worth stopping to watch. After midnight nothing was on. He ate his ice cream watching an infomercial about a new kitchen appliance.

After he finished his ice cream, Tom put the bowl on the kitchen counter next to all the other dirty dishes that needed to go into the washer tomorrow. He went to the thermostat near the front door and turned the air conditioning up. It was last week that Sam had come in through the front door with his mother, knees skinned and hands bleeding. Sam said it was because he tried to fly on the play ground in the park. Margaret was furious with Tom. Tom was furious with Sam. Margaret sent Sam to the bathroom to wash his cuts.

"You can't tell a five year old that they can fly, Tom," Margaret had said.

Tom was quiet. Margaret shook her head and went to the bathroom to help Sam. After a few moments Tom heard the scream from the disinfectant spray being used on Sam. It wouldn't be until they had put Sam down for bed hours later that Tom would talk to his wife again, "Should I not tell him the truth?"

"The truth?" Margaret asked, lost as to what he was talking about. She pulled back the covers and was sliding into bed.

"The truth. That he can fly."

"Tom, what are you talking about?" Her eyes met his. They were wide with worry. He tried to explain to her what he meant, but her eyes never changed. After an hour he stopped trying to convince her. He threw himself on the bed and turned off his light, sleeping away from her. She had put a hand on his shoulder, gently caressing it with her thumb. He took a breath, knowing she was trying to comfort him.

Later that night, when Margaret had gone to sleep, Tom snuck into

Sam's room. He shook his son awake rougher than he meant to.

"Daddy? What's wrong?"

"Why didn't you fly?" Sam looked at him sleepily.

"I tried—"

"No, you didn't," Tom was angrier than he had ever been at Sam, "If you really tried then you would have flown. I know you can fly."

Sam was on the verge of tears. Tom left the room without another word.

He didn't talk to his son about flying again. But still, the fact remained, Tom knew his son could fly. But how could he make him do it? Sam acted so normal, like all the rest of the children, but Tom knew he wasn't. What could Tom do to prove to Sam, Margaret, and everyone that his child could fly? Tom paced through his house while he thought, eventually coming to the garage. Tom flicked on the light as he went through the door, thinking deeply. An old wooden ladder that had been his father's laid on the far side. He walked over to it and measured it with his eyes. It was too tall to stand in the room and too long to be dragged through the house. Tom opened the garage door manually to keep the noise from waking Margaret. The night air rushed in, heating the garage, making Tom sweat instantly. He pulled the ladder out of the garage and leaned it against the side of the house. It didn't make it all the way but it wouldn't be difficult to get from the top of the ladder onto the roof.

Tom went back inside, the coolness of the house froze his sweat to his skin and he shivered. Within a few silent minutes Tom was inside Sam's room, "Sam, buddy, wake up."

Sam rolled over cautiously. The last time Tom had woke him up in the middle of the night he had been upset. But Tom wasn't upset, he was excited.

"Daddy? What is it?"

"I've got something to show you, Sam. Come on," Tom picked Sam up from the bed under his armpits and held him close. Sam instinctively wrapped his arms around his father's neck.

"What are we gonna see?" Sam asked, but Tom didn't respond. He was busy whisking him downstairs and toward the garage. Sam squeezed his neck a little and asked again.

"You'll see in a minute," Tom laughed as they went out into the garage.

"Is there something going on outside?" Sam asked as Tom moved

toward the open air.

“There will be.”

“What is it?”

“You’ll see.”

Tom moved Sam around to a piggy-back position for the ladder. It was difficult and the ladder kept shaking as he climbed it.

“Are we gonna look at the stars?”

“Yes!” Tom croaked, Sam’s arms had tightened around his throat in excitement. They would look at the stars. After.

They were at the top of the ladder. The roof was farther away than Tom had realized from the ground. He stretched and put his elbows barely in place enough to begin to lift himself up. Tom wasn’t as strong as he used to be. Panting, he pulled himself and his son up onto the slanted rooftop. There was a clatter down below loud enough to wake the entire neighborhood. In the last moments of mounting the roof, Tom must have put the ladder off balance. It was now resting against the concrete of the drive way what looked like miles below. Tom hoped it hadn’t woken Margaret.

“What’s that one, Dad?” Sam had barely noticed the sound, staring up at the sky. Earlier that summer Tom had started to tell Sam about the constellations. Tom struggled to make out which constellation he was pointing at. He placed Sam gently on the roof as he tried to remember. Sam walked off toward it, facing the back yard. There would never be a more perfect time.

Tom walked slowly up to Sam and they stood by the edge in silence. Sam was looking up at the sky. Tom was looking down at Sam. Tom put his hands on his son’s shoulders. Sam looked up at him and they both smiled. The next moment Sam was in the air, flailing, too surprised to scream. He was caught in the wind, weightless. Tom barked a laugh.

Then gravity grabbed Sam and pulled him back toward the earth. Tom’s eyes widened, his jaw dropped as he realized what he had just done. Sam bounced on the trampoline once before being launched to the ground with a sickening crack.

FALLEN INTO FLAME AND SHADOW

Brandon Stettenbenz

Thoughts piled
in toppling stacks
mounds of dream
slithered into shadow,
The inhuman street
hopelessly crowded
tearing hearts from shells

Agnostic poets wrongfully
indebted to the cannon,
Ragged artists
reeling in mad velocity
encumbered by cancerous fear
weeping elegies amidst
a G.I. Joe generation—
ignorant to hunger
yet ravenous

Adorned with platinum chains
war machined collars
binding young fools
to dry silver wells—
Purple murder famed lapels
hot brass jingling merrily,
red symphony
of mercenary white
raining blue despair

Price tags piercing children
condoned by higher institutions
campus quad solicitations

of eager empty souls—
Nationalist climates of terror
spun on death's fell loom
by weavers of metal mind
through an enslaving apparatus
from which all hate decries,

Steel wheels rend war decrees
as fire birds rain down silence
order scorching fertile fields
pastoral visions oil blackened
irradiated with yellow light,
Hydrogen spectacle of invention
whose corona steals
all hope by design,
Eyes blistered by power
no longer able to descry

EDITORS

JOHN SCOTT BREWER has carried antique spoons for five years now and written poetry for around seven. He has more spoons this year than last and is pursuing a Major in English Education, and Katie Orberon, the latter not being currently taught at IUS.

BRANDON STETTENBENZ will be completing his final semester by the time this goes to print. He has applied to full-residency MFA programs in poetry and will be anxiously humming Jeopardy music until April. He aspires to eventually teach creative writing at the university level while continuing to write and publish. Brandon reads often during open-mic segments around the Louisville area, and dabbles in journalism from time to time. His collection of rejection slips grows larger each month, but he believes his stubborn tenacity will win out, eventually. Brandon enjoys most music that isn't auto-tuned and drinking beer at Richo's. When he's not reading, writing, or laboring over homework, he's enjoys playing video games and watching British Comedies.

JONATHAN CARSON once misspelled "dormitory" during a grade school county-wide spelling bee. It haunts him to this day.

CHRISTINA DAVIDSON considers herself to be a bit of a poetry aficionado, yet she has recently read more fiction. When she considers her propensity to root for the underdog (baseball, cassette tapes, olive pizza), she realizes that reading poetry will probably always be her favorite. She loves blue tinted mason jars, eating dairy products of all sorts, the way her dog smells when he sleeps, and soft donkey noses. For some strange reason, she often enjoys performing mundane tasks (such as cleaning the bathroom or counting spare change), yet overall she lives a fairly exciting life.

THOMAS OLGES: Married, two cats.

MELANIE SMITH is currently working through her final semester at IU Southeast and, therefore, walks in the mysterious realm of the in-between. Lately she's been feeling ridiculously sentimental, so you may find her accosting you with a hug in the hallway even if your only encounter was the day you loaned her a pencil. She loves books, art, music, and films and obsessively quotes her favorites in her everyday life, everything from Dostoevsky to Kerouac to the Gilmore Girls. To prevent herself from feeling pompous and self-aggrandizing as she uncomfortably writes about herself, she leaves you with a little-known fact that prevents her from ever clinging to excessive pride. She once owned a pair of hot pink Hammer Pants. That's her embarrassing little secret, but try not to hold it against her too much; she is a child of the nineties. Hey, a lot of good things came out of that decade, like Pearl Jam, Primus, My So-Called Life, and the permission for people who aren't lumberjacks to wear flannel. What does this have to do with her job as editor on the Review? Nothing. And everything.

MICHAEL HAMMETT is a senior at IUS, majoring in the twin English disciplines of Writing and Literature. He specializes in the field of Marxist philosophy and literary criticism. He enjoys writing crime fiction and agitprop, striving to play the role of the flaming menetekel to the upper-class orgy that is late capitalism. He is interested in the larger-than-life allegories of Herman Melville, the hard-boiled detectives of Dashiell Hammett, the alienated protagonists of Carson McCullers, and the cinema of Brian de Palma. Post-graduation, he plans to begin to prepare for embarking upon the adventure of graduate school and weathering the attendant wave of crushing student debt.

RANDILYN WOERTZ is finishing up her senior year at IU Southeast and will graduate in the spring with a BA in Fine Arts - Graphic Design. She's such a sucker for retro designs. And by the way, she's crazy in love with Leonard from "Big Bang Theory" T.V. show.

The editors of the IU Southeast Review would like to offer their absolute gratitude to Professor Tom O'Neal for his unwavering guidance, patience and support of this magazine.

IU SOUTHEAST REVIEW 2012 SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

- Any person who is an active undergraduate student during the submission period may submit work.
- Editors reserve the right to request confirmation of current student status.
- Submissions may be made in any of the following categories: Poetry, Fiction, Flash Fiction, Creative Nonfiction, Photography, Art, and Book Review (Long form or Blurb).
- Please send all submissions to iusoutheastreview@gmail.com. We only accept electronic submissions.
 - Please send submissions as an attachment.
 - In the body of the email include your name and contact information. No personal information should be included in the attached submission.
 - Written work should be sent in a Microsoft Office compatible format, preferably .doc or .docx, but we will also accept .rtf, .txt, etc.
 - Photographs (or photographs of artwork) should be sent in a high resolution. .jpg (or .jpeg) file.
- Submissions must be received by midnight of the deadline date. Deadlines are available in the IU Southeast Review Office and the Arts and Letters Office.
- Simultaneous submissions are accepted.
- It is okay to submit previously published work as long as the author retains the copyright to said work.
- You can only submit your own original work.
- We hate to be stifling, but, due to space limits in the publication, the following guidelines should be followed for length of submissions for each category:
 - Fiction and Creative Nonfiction must be 5,000 words or less.
 - Poetry must be under 100 lines.
 - We consider Flash Fiction to be anything under 500 words. Anything larger will be classified as Fiction.
 - Photographs and Artwork can be any size, but, if selected, will be scaled to fit the publication.

- You can submit in multiple categories but please submit no more than two pieces each in Fiction, Creative Nonfiction, and Long Form Book Reviews or five pieces each in Poetry, Photography, Flash Fiction, Book Review Blurbs, and Art.
- Submissions will be judged blindly by a panel of student editors.
- No more than two works by one author will be selected for publication within a single category
- You will be notified by email if your work is accepted. Please do not email us to find out; we will let you know as soon as we have made the final decision.
- Submission to the IU Southeast Review gives us permission, upon acceptance of a work, to publish said work in the IU Southeast Review and to use it in promotional materials relating to the IU Southeast Review.
- The guidelines above may be amended, only when necessary, at the discretion of the editors.
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