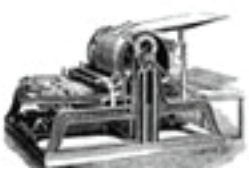
DUAL MAGAZINE COAST

DUAL COAST

ISSUE #2 DUAL COAST MAGAZINE 2014

Dual Cost Magazine features both established and emerging writers! Each issue is filled with stories, poems, staff articles, photography, recipes, art, and other offerings. Hundreds of submissions are carefully vetted, and only the very best are selected each issue. What results is a sampling of today's finest literary voices in a format that is fun to read.

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DUAL COAST

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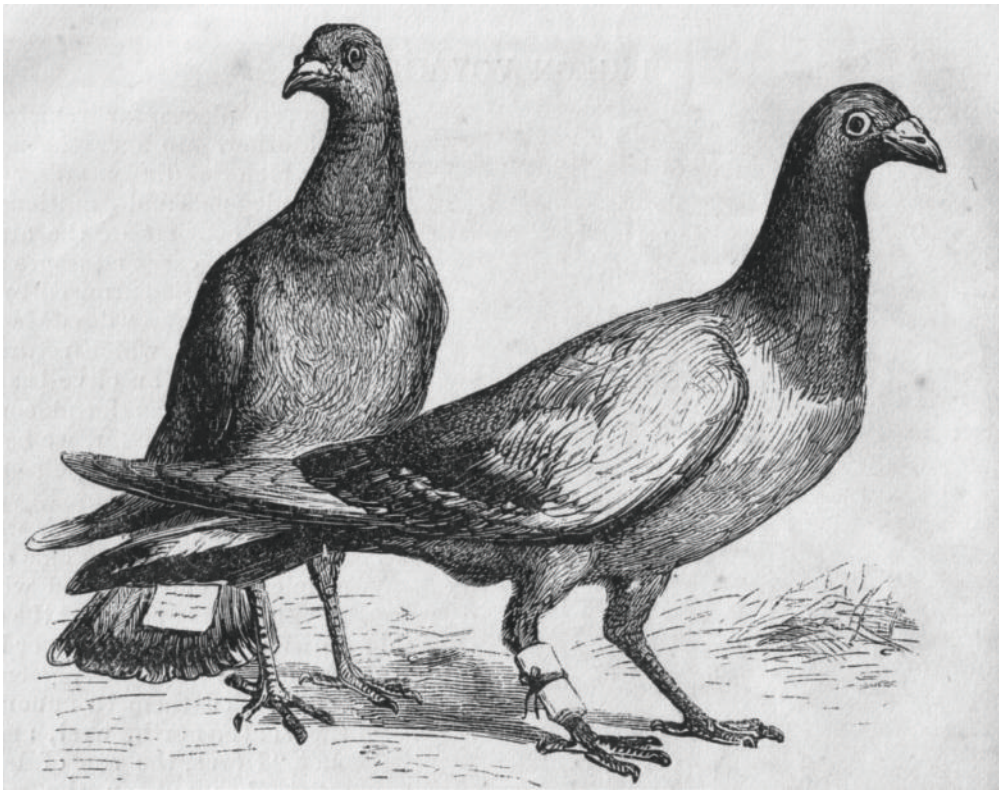




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Adiba Jaigirdar

Victoria

Victoria, forgive yourself

You spent years in the darkness
windows closed, doors locked shut.
Alone, you bled as each mistake
seared your skin for eternity.

We never learnt to say
'No,
Stop.'
only 'Yes'
brushed the tip of our tongues.

I felt the backbite every single day.
I was bruised beyond repair by thirteen.

Victoria, forgive yourself

Every mistake shines like sweat on your skin.
You take every hit as if your skin is made of armour,
not glass.
You never shatter, but you shatter too easy.

Count the bruises on your skin,
the blood droplets on your fingers.
You blame yourself for every mistake.
You always said 'Yes.'

Victoria, forgive yourself
because
you were deaf as a child,
blind on your wedding night
and dumb throughout marriage.

Victoria, forgive yourself.

Freedom does not exist but
if you open the windows, doors and your eyes
you can hear and see
as I make your mistakes,
wear them like a banner across my chest.

You never taught me 'No'
Only 'Yes.'

Victoria, forgive yourself
and I can forgive you.



Paper Boats

Spent my childhood with
the paper boats in the rain
and returned home
soaked to my bare bones,
chilled to my fragile core.

Some days I shouted
'achoo' into the empty halls
and sat by the window to
watch the rain wash
away my paper boats.

Last night I sobbed into
my pillow and tasted
salt and pain,
remembered the pretty rain
and forgotten paper boats.



Epidemic

You gave me mouth-to-mouth
poison:
diffused slow and sweet
through each bone
nestled in joints
a black heart of
black cobwebs,
every disease in
this bloody world
spread head to toe,
my mind
a cadaverous caricature
my heart
a child's desire.

You gave me breath-to-breath
concussion:
cigarette smoke
dancing on my tongue
launches deep
and beyond,
toxic
every breath we shared.

I have no breath left-
asthma.
my bones, half broken-
arthritis.
dizziness, nausea, breathlessness.
symptoms
you gave me
diseases
each one.

I left a thank you note
in the pocket of your shirt-
the one,
beside your awful, beautiful
heart.

E Campbell

Enjoying Me

I have been weepy lately,
like the willow hanging over the house

not at tissue commercials
or dramas necessarily
but yes, those too

I have been tearing up,
something overcomes me
a feeling I can't put my finger on

I have been dabbing moist eyes
at the slightest great revelation
like the scent of fresh coffee wafting toward me

from the light May breeze, our maker
set against the open window, steam rising
and flowing onto my hand, as if fog is rolling
like a spirit

onto the grounds
and I have been wondering,
about water and steam and life
my life

simple, yet significant
I have been thinking too much,
about it all and yet, I am grateful
this early morning,

knowing who I am
plain black coffee, decaf
water processed organic
fair trade

I have been me lately.

Float Like a Butterfly

cat stands at the sliding door
brown moths and gnats taunt him
a round light above, casts a halo
guards his body; stage lit

opponents fly down in sputters
darting left and right, he steadies

with his paws extended, jabs
high and low, clutching his mitts
as he shuffles with a quick one, two

punches the air reaching out
pulls back, then leans in
trapping a gnat on the glass

three, four, five, six....nine, ten
knocked out, I lay on the couch
curled up in a ball cheering him on.



Melissa Davis

Love Works in Strange Ways

Margaret jumped in the car and breathed a sigh of relief. Now her sort-of-mother-in-law would have to deal with the baby for a few days. She and Frankie could finally have some alone time again.

She grabbed her purse off the floor, buckled her seatbelt, and pulled out her cell phone.

"Let's go," she said to Frankie.

"Where to?" he asked.

"My God, do I have to make every decision for you? Just drive back to our house. We can finally enjoy some peace and have fun."

Margaret was sick of Frankie. Should they have the baby or not? He didn't know. Well, they did. Should they get married or not? He didn't know. Well, they didn't. Now he couldn't even figure out how to get himself home. It was really pathetic.

As Frankie drove along, Margaret scrolled through her phone for text messages. Then, she turned on the camera, took a selfie, smiled approvingly, and uploaded it to Facebook as her new profile picture. At least she didn't have any baby-weight left. She looked good – and she knew it.

When they got back to the house, Margaret beat Frankie out of the car and hurried into the house. She grabbed two beers from the fridge and handed one to Frankie, who was finally coming up beside her. The beer felt cool sliding smoothly down her throat. She had missed this.

"What should we do?" Frankie asked.

"Just sit and watch TV? Is that what you want? Well, I don't think so," she pulled a cigarette out of her purse, lit it with one strike of the match, and took a deep drag.

"Then what do you have planned?"

"Let's call some of our friends." And by our friends, Margaret meant hers as Frankie didn't have any friends of his own.

She quickly got on the phone and made some calls, taking in a second beer as she did so. By the time she finished, she had confirmed that at least fifteen friends would make their way over to the house.

She stubbed her cigarette out on the kitchen counter and grabbed Frankie's keys. She would need some more beer.

"Where are you going?" Frankie asked.

"Just up the road for a beer run."

"You want me to come?"

"No. Stay here and wait for our friends."

She wondered why she couldn't get a moment of peace to herself. If it wasn't the baby, it was Frankie.

Margaret ran to the convenience store down the road and was quickly back with her trunk full of beers and a few cartons of cigarettes. She was in no hurry to return to the home she shared with Frankie, but then she didn't want to miss the fun of hanging out with her friends. She missed them since the baby. She never realized what a downer having a baby could be.

She pulled up to the driveway of Frankie's house and saw a few of her friends had already arrived. Within minutes, the beers were opened and the cigarettes were lit. Within an hour, fifteen friends had come to join the fun. Beer bottles were scattered around the house and cigarette stubs and burns littered the carpet. The entire house was tinged with a beer-and-smoke-odor. To Margaret, it was the sweetest smell and one that she inhaled with the fondness that absence creates.

"What is going on here? This place is a mess!" Frankie yelled.

"Don't stress," Margaret called to him. "It's all good. You can clean tomorrow."

"Like hell I will."

Why did Frankie choose now to grow a pair when all her friends were here? She followed him as he stormed off through the door.

"What is your problem?" she asked him.

"Nothing is wrong with me. I thought we were going to spend a nice night together."

"We would be if you would calm down."

"You're messing with my house. It's chaos in there."

"Our house," she countered, finishing off a bottle of beer.

"I'm leaving. If this place is ours, clean it up yourself."

Margaret could not believe Frankie was being such a downer. How did she ever get mixed up with someone so green?

Then, Margaret got mad. She had his baby for God's sake. And this is how he treats her? She can't even have one free night?

"Get back here!" she yelled.

"Screw you!"

Margaret ran to where Frankie was walking to his car and threw her beer bottle at him.

"What are you doing? Crazy!" he yelled.

"I'm not crazy! I'm trying to have a conversation!"

She spun around, feeling dizzy and lightheaded from the alcohol and smoke. Other beer bottles lined the driveway – droppings from her friends' fun night. She bent down and grabbed another. This time, she ran right to Frankie and rammed the bottle into his head, breaking it over his scalp.

"What?" he muttered, dazed by the blow.

"You can't leave me," Mar garet said. "You love me. We belong together."

Margaret was fuming. All the months she had sacrificed to this loser. She bent down, grabbed another bottle, and slammed it into his head again.

Blood trickled down Frankie's skull and a nasty cut ran from his mid-skull to forehead. The friends from the party ran outside to watch the one-sided fight. It was creating quite a ruckus. The neighbors heard some of the yelling and excitement.

"What's going on out there?" the man next door called over.

His calls were ignored.

"I'm calling the cops," he called again.

Again, he was ignored.

Frankie dropped down to ground, placing his hand to his head. He looked at the blood that covered his hand in confusion. Then, he looked up at Margaret.

"Don't look at me like that," she said. "You made me do it."

She went back into the house and most of her friends followed. She opened another beer bottle and quickly emptied the contents. She thought, momentarily, about sending a rag out to Frankie. She quickly thought better of it – he should sit out there and think about how he treated her.

Then, they all heard the sirens. Margaret ran outside. A police car was pulling up to Frankie's house. It stopped and an officer got out of the car. He had his flashlight on and was pointing it in Frankie's direction.

"I got a complaint for this house. Anything wrong here?"

Margaret stepped forward.

"No officer, just a party. I'm sorry if we got a little loud," she said.

The officer shined his light on Frankie.

"What happened here?"

"Nothing officer, he just fell," she answered again.

"Is that so?" the officer asked.

"Yes, sir. Clumsy of me, right?" Frankie answered.



Leaving the Last Line

I grew up on the West Side, a corner of South Bend, IN., where the poor managed to get by. My father spent his mornings driving the back-alleys, rooting through garbage, looking for anything valuable or fixable. Predicting what he might come home with was nearly impossible, and the treasures he found would find their way through the neighborhood. A yellow lamp was sold to Mrs. Elks for a dollar—a half-empty can of Pennzoil was traded to Kenny Gifford for two tomatoes—dad always seemed to find a home for everything. The West Side was a rough life, rough for everyone, but together the babies were raised, the dead were buried, and the garbage trucks ran on Tuesdays.

One blistering Tuesday in July, dad returned from "junking" with an oddly-shaped green box. It stood out from the junk because it had no scratches, not even dust from the truck seemed to cling to it. "Take this to Rosie," he said with a smile, "she's been looking for one of these." I did as I was told, loading the large green box onto a rolling cart. I hauled the load to Rosie's where I was greeted by her dog.

Rosie's dog, an old grey Shepherd mix with a sagging belly, was the friendliest dog I ever met—despite spending its whole life tied to a rock in her front yard. Rosie's house sat on the corner, a faded yellow shack beneath an enormous oak tree. The back was marked by an outhouse that wafted unmistakable odors down the street. Nobody seemed to care, and anyone who came close enough would be met by Rosie. She liked to talk, and talk, and all her conversations began the same way, "you there, did you meet my dog Shep?" The insistence of her voice assured everyone that she would not be denied, and the conversation would not be short.

The screen-door hung on its hinges, rattling back and forth against the doorframe as I knocked on it. Rosie came to the door, "Ohh Lordy, Ohh Lordy, what have you got there child?" There was an excitement in her eyes, and she didn't even bother to open the screen-door, she just stepped through the empty frame and loomed over the green box on the cart. She fumbled with the sides for a long minute until at last the top seemed to pop off, revealing a beautiful typewriter. Rosie squealed with happiness, "Ohhh come to mama you beautiful girl." I thought she was going to hug me, but her arms passed straight to the typewriter, lifting it in one fluid motion, and carrying it inside. She closed the door behind her, and astonishingly, she never said goodbye.

~~~OOO~~~

My husband and I traveled from the East Side to visit my aging parents. The truck my dad used to use for his junking adventures sat rusting in the yard, its hulking frame now supported by cinder blocks and the back was covered by a sagging tarp. Their house still had the same orange shag-carpet, the same wallpaper depicting wooden spoons. Little had changed really, and what did seemed to happen so slowly that it was unnoticeable. When we arrived the mood was sullen. There was something in the air, a sorrow and ache I had not seen in my father's eyes since Mrs. Elks moved away. "I might as well tell you," he said softly, "Rosie is on her deathbed, and she won't let the doctors help her no more."

I had not seen Rosie for several months. She was 92 years old, and it was hard to imagine the neighborhood without her. Her house on the corner was the cornerstone of the neighborhood. Kensington Ave. was not like my East Side neighborhood. Here people knew their neighbors—we knew the kids, the grandkids, the dogs and cats, the cars and jobs, the dinners and the gorgeousness of the mundane. We were a family, and although I had moved away, I was born into the neighborhood. I was a Westsider, and I did what Westsiders do; I visited my neighbor.
~~~

I approached Rosie's door, which had flung itself open with the breeze, clattering against the shack. The windows were open and Kenny Gifford stepped out from his porch several houses down. He yelled up the street, motioning with his arms, "Just go in. Go on in. She's not coming to the door, April, just go in." I understood the situation and stepped through the door, pausing only for a moment to look at the old rock where Shep used to be tied. "Rosie, it's me April, I came to see how you're doing."

There were only two rooms in Rosie's house, she was in the bedroom, spread out on the bed with one red slipper dangling from her foot. The bed seemed to be the only place in the room that was not covered in clutter—there were stacks of bundled papers everywhere. I approached the bed and I knew she was already gone. She looked like a stranger to me, the way her mouth pulled back without her false teeth. "Ohh Rosie, I'm sorry I came too late to say goodbye." I sat on the edge of her bed and cried like a baby for several minutes until my cries turned into an aching lump in my throat, which faded into an empty place in my heart.

I took a good look around the house before I left. I wanted to remember her house, maybe wash away the sight of her laying there—I wanted to remember how she lived. I noticed the bundled stacks of paper that filled the bedroom were typed. She must have used that old green typewriter every day since she got it. She left a sheet in the roller which read, "I don't see no way around this fact. There ain't no way I can write the last line myself."

-Staff

Mrs. Button's Stuffed Tomatoes

from the Collection of C. Edward Mannon,
Petaluma Cookbook 1915, Petaluma History Room

Select nice, round tomatoes.
Slice off the tops and remove the centers.

Make a dressing of breadcrumbs, mince beef, onions, parsley, celery seed, a small piece of butter, pepper and salt.

Stuff each tomato with this and replace tops.
Set them carefully in a pan with a little water and a teaspoon of butter. Bake until done.

Rich Ives

Acceptance



don't include everything you know don't include time and the other
thieves don't include the early age of little ones assembling
suns include the several dragging sounds of husbandry
include the parents with the one voice of many mice



whisper what you've learned to children fallen
which had been a man in his fifties escaping whisper to
the light in her room where the room in the man had been
and include the light resembling skin remember when

the baby was throwing out its own bathwater include that
include Uncle Shady offering a wilted rose remember
the mulberry thump whispering apple kisses a disease of amen
include where there's allegory in The Parable of the Elderly Fly



better not to explain austerity to the new country's dampness
include fingers scented with heartburn include a lake
without a shore a river with no banks don't include
what you'll do in the after don't include when you're after

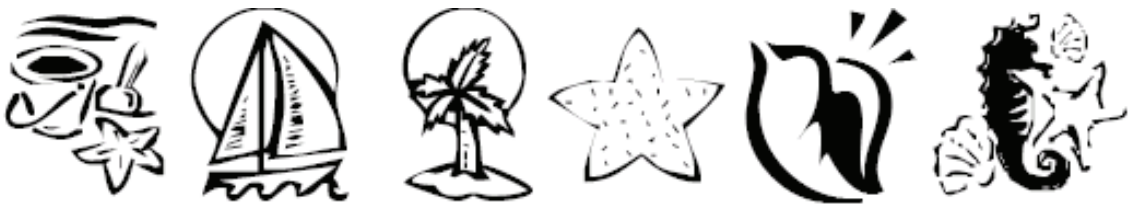
don't include a question you lost that had something to do with
memory don't include the mask of action worn by politicians
repeating itself to no end but include the weapon you can point
only one direction include a philosopher risen early to query the sun



don't include the rustle of an insect circling inside a bowl or the grasses
of the meadow brushing our passage like the touch of distant planets include
butchered oxen and pottery along the road cheering the liberators
with their empty gullets and standing to the attention deserved

don't include the huge black eyes of the horse bulging in fear
a box of caramels or the puppet that frightened her include
a gentleman shaped with the shears of a windstorm I'll be
two arms and a hidden place you be the absence include that





Rich Ives

After the Revolution

the
ones
that
were
still
open
the
ones
that
al-
ways
come
back
the
ones
with
their
own
con-
tain-
ers

I've declared newspapers I've declared doorsteps
I've brought my enemies a chamber pot covered
with letters written in organic straw

I carried a little reasoning along for rescue work
and seasoned the possible with a willing and a floating meadow

there was a long piece of misunderstanding held by the rebels
who were going to lose to the authorities who called themselves
rebels once more and replaced themselves

(I collected a grateful widow and her deliciously wooden children)

because I'm guilty of a spectacle given to me by my fog
and because I waited and because my radio only talks

(no singing corrupts air waves / no dancing stretches out from its broadcast front)
and because the people always wanted the one thing
inside that stayed behind its head with a slight concussion

I had an army in my head I didn't know how to use
every year more lost loves in my beard surrender

tea was a new way of seeing things
one town on the hill with the churches
and the other in the swamp with the money

I wanted more stuttering and wraparound limbs
the adverbs were young wore black jackets with red tennis shoes

I told Melanie penmanship I didn't have any but knew
where to get a six-pack I had some truth but knew enough to save it till later

I found a box of crying left open on the bed where the body had fallen
containing its theories about the psychology of political detectives

(not the tree but the idea of the tree entered a box of wooden boxes)

because the bed was tired late last night I woke it up and took it home
dancing its bad stories wanted to meet every one of those
willing people who thought we were lovers and

I put their opinions in a drawer
closed them

the ones that were still open
the ones that always come back
the ones with their own containers

Rich Ives

Afterword

1. This particular accident allows the place where a bird was joined
and the sound a footprint makes retreating––

shadows folded neatly against the execution wall.

2. I drank the gallon of thunder I've been sleeping with
and the trombones made a nervous storm

grateful for the distraction.

3. The man too was purified and marching along
with the tear-stained trouble that followed.

My charges weren't adequately pressed they say.

4. *Come here now*, they say, gone when they hear me.
If you want to be ignored, use a megaphone.

Others say *girlfriend* they say *sex and*.

5. *Breasts*, they say, *two badgers in a sack*,
dissecting weather. Anatomy appeals

to the old butcher in all of us, but secretly.

6. Worshipping the diction of apparently birds, and
the squirrels are broken, and my toolbox is filled with peanuts, and

I was standing in front of a horse trying to figure out where the beginning was.

7. Hope might not leap so eternal if we knew
not to hope for the further thing like

a memory of comfortable lawn impressions.

8. *Alder me vertical, sleepy Nature Boy,*
looking down on a cloud stuffed in short shorts,

someone admiring me once said in their own way.

What they do doesn't matter very much.
What they experience does.

9. Purple-blossomed lungwort's mottled hankie leaves
anticipate a sleepy kind of milk faith.

The fence in the river separates when from deliver––
entrance before arrangement, a warm sleeve.

I don't have to go away now.
None of this is about me. Neither are you here.

Troy Farah

Resolutions

When I woke up, it was 12:32 AM January 1st Year Whatever. Coming home from work a few hours prior, I took a nap and when I awoke, the New Year had started without me.

I hastily went into the living room where my roommate was practicing bong rips like he was rehearsing for the Potlympics, straddling a PS3 controller and digging through a bag of Doritos, the Cool Ranch flavored ones.

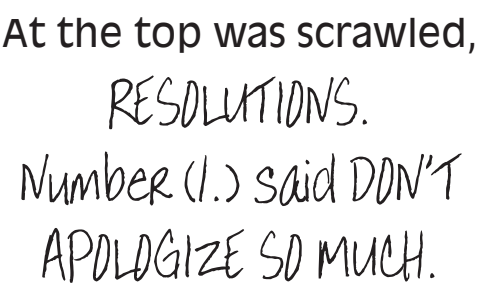
"I overslept," I said.

"Oh really?" He didn't take his eyes off the TV.

"Yeah," I said bitterly. I threw on my jacket and headed out the door. "You could've woken me up."

"Oh yeah… for tonight… that thing."

I slammed the door.



I smoked my last cigarette on the walk to downtown. I passed a number of cops barking at drunk drivers, throwing them in handcuffs, carting them off. A few fights broken up. Confetti, burnt out fireworks, busted beer bottles everywhere. I added my cigarette butt to the mix.

I entered a dive bar, but it was already cleared out. Just a middle-aged couple in the corner wearing party hats and giggling, waiting to sober up before attempting to drive home. I ordered a bottle of something cheap from Mexico and glanced at my phone. No missed calls, no texts, nothing. I shot a few texts out to friends asking where the action was and sipped my beer. It was close to 1:00 now, and I got one text back immediately: "Yo mann were at margaritsas!" I chugged my beer and waved the bar tender down for another.

"It's 1:05," the bartender said. "You thinkin' about splitting so I can go home?"

"I missed the ball drop."

"What?"

"I missed the ball drop, the confetti, the cheering, everything."

The bartender looked confused and annoyed. I waved the bottle again and he replaced it with a sour look. I apologized, paid him, chugged half the beer and put the other half in my jacket pocket. A road soda. I walked a few blocks and pulled out a sheet of paper with a list on it. At the top was scrawled, RESOLUTIONS. Number (1.) said DON'T APOLOGIZE SO MUCH.

My phone announced another text, this one more garbled than the last: "hollys 2 drrnk pukkin everrwher b sorr dudee . well hang ou t soonn." I sighed and approached a food truck, ordering a Chicago-style hot dog. I ate it as I walked toward the park. Some fireworks shot off near some trees and two teenagers ran and cop sirens sounded off not far away and the fireworks exploded.

I pulled out my resolutions list again and read number (2.) DON'T EAT JUNK FOOD. I looked down at my hot dog and threw the rest on the ground and stomped on it. Was my memory that bad? These resolutions were written mere hours ago.

I walked to a club and tried to get in, the music still pumping loud. The bouncer grabbed me by the collar, "Twenty dollar cover." I forked over a twenty and went inside. The music was Top 40 hits strung out through a meat grinder and laced with funk samples. My ears begged for me to take their lives.

By the time I made it to the bar, I was told last call was 15 minutes ago. I took out my Resolutions list and read the last one: (3.) DON'T CALL SARAH. A minute later, I was dialing Sarah. She answered on the third ring.

"Hello?" It was really loud wherever she was and she was yelling. "Who is this?"
"It's me."
The phone clicked dead. I waited a minute and dialed again. This time, when she answered, it was quiet in the background.
"Whaddya want?" She almost growled.
"Oh, well, I overslept and missed the ball drop and I was just wondering if you wanted to party or hang out or anything or yeah."
"Now's not the time," Sarah said. "Maybe tomorrow."
"Oh yeah, um, OK, yeah, call me."
"Sure."
Click
"Sorry."

I walked home and kicked at things and swore under my breath. A girl was ahead of me, so I tried to walk slower and she switched to the other side of the sidewalk and without meaning to I yelled, "I'm not a rapist."

"What?" She turned. "Hey, wait a minute, I know you."
Years ago, she was in my African American Literature class. Her name was Julie.
"What are you doing out here?"
"I live over there." I pointed. "In those apartments."
"Oh, well, cool. Nice to run into you."
She walked a few steps and I said after her, "I missed the ball drop."
"Huh?"
"You know, the ball drop, the whole shebang."
"This is Tempe. We don't have a ball drop. That's way off in New York or something."
"Yeah, but still."
"Still what."
"Sorry. I was just… disappointed isn't the right word. I dunno."
A police siren did the whole Doppler number the next street over. Julie paused. "You wanna drink some hot chocolate at my place? That way you can walk me home and I won't get mugged or killed."
"Sure," I nodded.
"No promises."
"What?"
"I mean," she paused and hiccupped. "Don't expect anything."
"Oh," I said. "I don't."
She stumbled into me. "Sorry, mighta drank too much."

We talked about that class we shared, then school in general and why we both dropped out and what we were doing now, which was mostly working low-end jobs until we got fired or found a different low-end job. When we reached her place, we she made hot chocolate and she spiked it with Bailey's and we ate some leftover Christmas cookies and sat on her couch watching TV.

"So, how was the rest of your New Year's, besides missing the 'big moment'?" Julie asked.
"Overslept. Had a beer or two. Not much to say."
"Well, you didn't miss much. I just drank myself into a coma and got hit on by ugly dudes from ASU."
"Do you have any New Year's Resolutions?"
"Yeah. Do you?"
"Sort of," I muttered.
"What are they?"
"I don't wanna say."

"Don't you think it's kind of hokey?"
"Hokey how?" Julie said. "Just tell me."
"I can't. Otherwise, they won't come true."
"They aren't birthday wishes, dummy. They're choices," Julie set her coffee mug down. "I'll tell you mine."
"What does it matter? I broke all of them in less than an hour anyway."
Julie laughed and it startled me. I realized she was still tipsy. "You wanna smoke?"
"Nah. Not in the mood."
On TV there was Hawaii, downtown Wherever-Lu, and they had a pineapple for a ball and it started dropping; 10, 9, 8, 7....
"Wanna kiss?" I asked.



6, 5, 4, 3...
"Why not?" Julie grinned.
2... 1...
Her lips tasted like vodka, hot chocolate, Bailey's and sugar cookies.
"So you already broke your resolutions? Does it feel good at least?"
I shook my head no.
"Let's break mine." She grabbed my hand and pulled me to her bedroom.
"You didn't tell me what your resolution was."
"Oh yeah. It's to stop sleeping with strange men," she said and pulled me down on the bed.





Galen R. Faison

O Fathers, Be a Compass to Your Sons

Ernest Hemingway is attributed to saying: "To be a successful father...there's one absolute rule: when you have a kid, don't look at it for the first two years." I'm certain that Hemingway was being glib, but in any account, I've completely eviscerated his decree. I've been looking upon my son for the nine-and-a-half years that he's been born. When he was three, my favorite pastime would be to watch him eat.

There was something mesmerizing about watching his little fingers manipulate a fork, scoop food into his mouth and chew—his cheeks and temples undulating in unison as he worked through a plate of silver-dollar pancakes.

There are many gratifying aspects of "son gazing." Unfortunately, there is a melancholic side. Allow me to clarify: the majority of the times when I look upon my son, I am awash with overwhelming tides of love, pride and guardianship. Then there are times, as a father, where I am enveloped in a forest of anxiety; ominous looking trees blot out the sun (the promise of danger lurking behind each one) and I'm without a clear path to emotional quietude.

It's been this way since his conception. Hell, the good doctor welcomed me into fatherhood by informing us (the missus and I) that our little cellular nugget may be stuck in one of her fallopian tubes. When a fertilized egg fails to reach the safety of the uterus, it's called an ectopic pregnancy. This usually results in the termination of the pregnancy. Two days later (I prayed throughout each one) and it turned out that our little guy was in the right place after all.

Apparently, embryos have their own forests to navigate.

I was able to enjoy that respite but only briefly. The pathway to a full-term birth can be treacherous. I was a wreck the first three months because those were the easy miscarry months. The following months were no nature walk either. Each visit to the obstetrician resulted in some new bear trap we had to evade: Down syndrome, spina bifida, cystic fibrosis and Tay-sachs disease. Genetic screening allayed most fears.
During one visit, the friendly obstetric nurse and I made an arrangement where she'd clandestinely deliver me a sealed envelope containing our child's genetic scorecard. We prolonged in learning the sex, preferring to focus on (his or her) overall health—but my patience had petered out. That day, with the envelope in hand, I slunk to the car ahead of my full-bellied wife and read the contents: normal chromosome count 46, XY...

A son.
This was a good day.

His birth(day) was harrowing. He hadn't come into the world easily. During the arduous delivery there were sinister-sounding terms caroming around the delivery room:

fetal distress, android pelvis, nuchal cord, not to mention, caesarean section. The younger doctors were nervous. They wanted to wheel my wife into the OR—ASAP. But our battle-tested obstetrician stayed them. What felt like eons passed before my son made his way into this world—no longer a babe in the woods.

He'd made it to another clearing.

Initially, my only want was for the clichéd five-fingers-five-toes. But I was exultant at being the father of a masculine child. I felt as though I had an advantage in raising a son. As a man, I understood how men thought, how men should act. I still can't figure women out. The divorce papers that I keep atop by bookshelf are a testament to that.

Even with my daddy face-time cut in half, the concept of raising a boy to a man seemed an easy enough assignment. But as my son grew, so did my anxiety. There were things I'd forgotten about boys.

Boys do crazy shit.

Crazy shit like: run the half-mile of Newark subway tracks, from the Washington to Warren street platforms; jump rooftop to rooftop; street race on bicycles, sans brakes; twist and tape together the wicks of four M-80 firecrackers; get walloped by station-wagons while straddling the double yellows in city traffic; spin-out in Ford Mustangs, narrowly avoiding utility poles.

Naturally there was the "shocker" game. My crew had discovered that if one held the metal door handle to the downtown Blimpie (a sandwich shop) and touched the neighboring light pole, a mild electric current would be gifted. The dare was always to see who could grip both the door and pole longest. Benji, a good friend who lives now only in memory, still holds the record: holding so long, in fact, that he temporarily lost sensation in his tongue.

Each of those memories loom like arboreal specters. They brood in the recesses of my psyche. There are so many things that are wrong (or that can go wrong) in this world, how do I shield my son without sheltering him? Will I be able to instruct him in the art of good decision making? Or instill in him a good, strong character and a steadfast spirit?

My father was hard on me. With him, discipline was not a game. His wrath trumped peer pressure in most cases. His yell shook oak trees. His glare froze tree sap. And when I'd really screwed up, he'd peel my backside bark. It was a microcosm for life: screw up and it's your ass.

Now, I think I understand the root of all his strict authority; he was likely scared to death. He'd once had his own forest to navigate and was determined to equip me to survive my own.

So, I'd cut grass on hot days while my friends ran carefree. But when hard times hit, and they were jobless, I was always able to sustain myself because my work ethic was intact. When the neighborhood boys would steal cars or tempt me into some other life impeding activity, his voice would boom warnings in my head and I'd excuse myself. I've since outlived a lot of those guys. So many lessons, I can hardly remember them all.
My father left me a map to work from and to improve upon. As a father now, I'll do what I can and pray that my direction will be enough for my son. I won't there for his every fall, sneeze, slip-up, embarrassment or heart-ache. But I, like my father for me, can equip him for survival.

I will protect him until he can protect himself.
I will guide him until he can plot his own route.



Dixon Hearne

Never Was



I'm serving kibble and greens to stick people who "do lunch" here to be seen. They hide behind designer sunglasses to make absolutely sure they're noticed by paparazzi and tacky fans that point and lunge and squeal. Last week, I deliberately tossed a salad all over Table 3. Most of it landed on you-know-who's pin-striped hair. She called me a clumsy bitch and I apologized profusely, all the while rubbing the oily dressing deep as I could into her one dress from Rodeo Drive – Armani knock-off at best. Boss Lady assured her I'd be "dealt with."

They come in here every day—in twos and threes usually—made up and reeking. I always ask for tables 1-6 by the patio where the wannabes like to be seated—all the "not famous enough yet" and "soon to be has-beens." But first they stop by Nordstrom's for a free make-up and a spritz before they prance through the door, fancying themselves wealthy and important—making a point of tipping heavily just to prove it. And all of them convinced they're the great stars reincarnated.

The Weasel was in yesterday, ordered a double martini, and two more before her lunch partner ar rived. "Give my friend a Cosmopolitan, dear," she says to me, "a dash of bitters." She inhaled three more before they each ordered their *plata de grass*.

The Weasel was in yesterday, ordered a double martini, and two more before her lunch partner arrived.

"I'm going to Clooney's on Saturday," says Cue-Tip. "I've got to buy a new dress." *Steal one, more like.*
"With Greg?" the Angelina wannabe says back to her.
"Hell no! He's yesterday's trash. They wouldn't let him near the gate. I'm going alone."
"Two Arugula Sprout plates coming right up," I say. "Another drink, ladies?"
"Another Cosmopolitan," Que-Tip says. "Don't you just love that name for a drink?" she says to Angelina. "Sounds so . . . cosmopolitan." A chaser of goofy giggles follows, as I set off to retrieve the bulimic specials du jour.

It's the same at most tables—just change the names and talking hairdos. Table 5 is the worst. "Breasts out to here, girl!" Jean Harlow's twin says to her lunch companion. "Implants the size of your head." Her friend didn't appreciate the comparison one bit. She won't be dining with Jean again, that much I know for sure.

You get good at predicting things if you work the tables long enough. I've been right here in the dirt with the best of them. I once watched Marlon Brando pick his nose and stick his pickings on another star's salad plate. Watched an A-lister slap the giggle right off Sally Field's face over her soup one time.
Honey, I can't tell you the number of Hollywood skanks that practice lunching here without panties—al fresco, I call it. Parting their legs for the camera when they leave for the powder room. Just like Britney Spears exiting her car. Remember?

Studio A-holes come in early to scope out a good table. They like eye-candy with their scotch. Sometimes they comp a round of drinks for the stick women—and tell me to be discreet. And when I deliver the drinks, I sometimes tell the women they came from a different table. After a cool minute or two, the women flash big, teethy grins at the table I told them. Sometimes it's just another table of women—I let them figure it out. And that just goes to show the kind of dumb bimbos that frequent this place. The dumber they are, the bigger the tip. *Go figure.*

Baldwin pops in, and some Sheens, and the Osbornes too. No mental giants in this place. Lots of groping and ogling, though. More happens under the tables in here than you'll find on late night. We used to get the big names—before they became big and changed. It's hard watching them on the screen now, disappearing under the make-up and studio lighting. You wouldn't believe the pitted cheeks and chins I've served here. Different hairlines every day. Half the real stars in this town are bald as a bat with wall-to-wall acne. It's absolutely amazing what they can do with the right cameras.

Look at Table 5 over there. Lohan and her special friend sat there yesterday. Ordered a martini—just like grown-ups. I carded Lohan and she flipped me off. She seems to think the help here is as dumb as the clientele. It's the same table where two women from "30 Rock" had a shouting match with Table 4 last week over a loud phone call. We ended up comping Table 4—after they threatened to call the Enquirer. I say, let them call. *Hell, these people are looking for publicity…let them have it!*

> "You've got to coddle the stars, Saundra," Boss Lady says to me. "They bring in the business."
>
> "What stars?" I say back to her. "You've got plastic anorexics and smarmy extras trying to claw their way up to the "D" list. Half of them skip out, and the delusional half over-tip with money from their unemployment checks."

She shrugs, but she knows I'm right. She knows the Baldwins and Sheens are right in their element in this place. We've even had televangelists drop in for lunch. Of course, they think table-servers, here in Sodom, wouldn't recognize an anointed figure when they present themselves. But they drink plenty and ogle even more. I can't say what happens when they leave, but the smell of money has lured more than one cue-tip into the church limo. I don't take pleasure in such hypocrisy—so you can pass me a rock too when it's time for a stoning. Even had that Rachel Maddow wander in here one day. Looks like the love child of John Kerry and Gertrude Stein. Nobody followed her out the door.

Be sure you heat the brandy for Joan Crawford over there at Table 3. And she likes things on the side—*like her marriages*. She and the blonde there with the Betty Grable legs meet here once a week to network. They talk about producers and directors—wouldn't waste their time on slippery actors. The one—Betty—claims she got a half-assed proposal from Spielberg or some big director to do a remake of Joan of Ark.

> "Wasn't she a virgin?" I asked her. "Kate Hepburn couldn't even pull that one off." And Miss Betty was not amused.

Her friend Joan had a similar tale. I almost tossed her salad too when she got to the part about playing Mother Theresa. The stories I hear in this place would singe a priest's ear. "When you're on duty," Boss Lady tells us, "you're eyes and ears belong to the restaurant. You listen for orders and requests only. You're deaf and blind to the private matters of our patrons."

Well, sometimes the patrons insist. They'll ask for my opinion, and I give it. But I'm warning you that all of them don't want an honest answer—which is unfortunate because I've been known to be brutally frank. I once told Burt Reynolds his rug looked real and Loni Anderson that her breasts don't. They asked and I told them. Same goes for that Kathy Griffin. She was a pretty nice girl back when she still had her own face. One more tug and it's going to fly up like a cheap window shade. She got half her material parked right over there at Table 6—her favorite spot. I thought she was much funnier before she became a bitter troll. She and Chelsea Handler—Cheesy Headlice we call her here—should co-host a skank-a-thon with other tired old leftovers with galloping egos from this place.

(Continued on page 47)

Jude Conlee

Neither Are Good

"We're trouble, all right,"
says the Chaos-Man as he chips
at the door with implements

"And I guess that makes us help,"
his Lawful equivalent puts in
while watching and doing nothing.

Things that Catch

There are a good many things that don't last
forever, and there are a good many things
I don't want to keep,

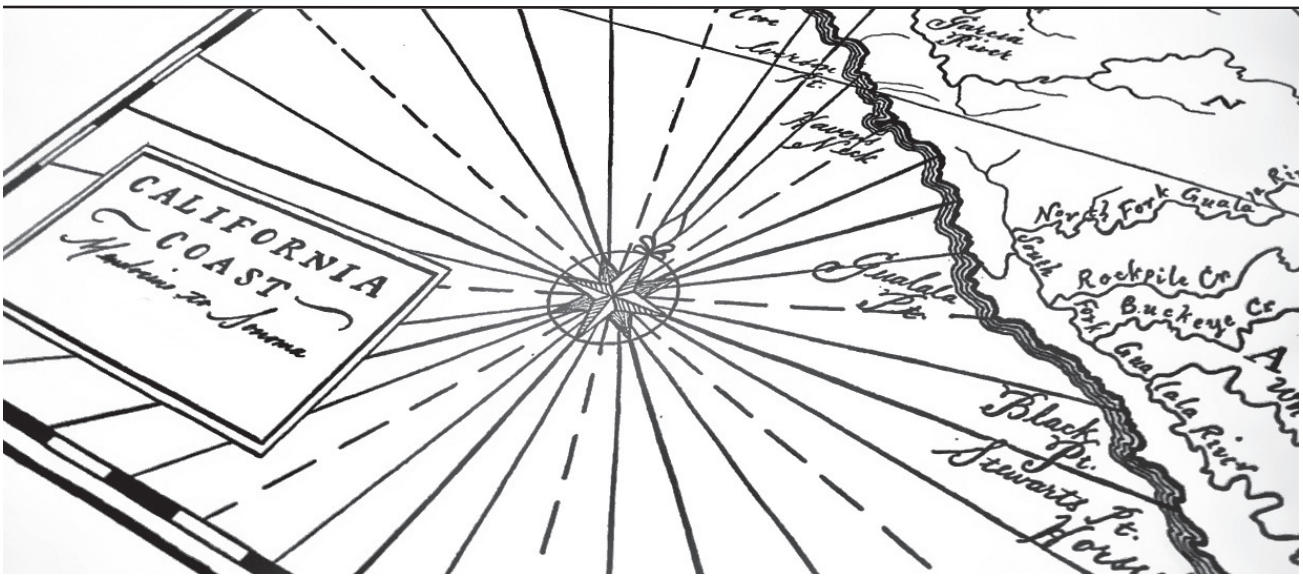
and how red is the anguish of looking outside,
how black is each motion in "running away",
how light and gray and imagined is the theory
I made one night, in somniac lies,
that states that everything happens, and therefore
everything is real.

Sans-all

If there's a universe with a copy of me wandering
it and calling an unfamiliar name and
looking up to a sky only faintly blue and lacking
its response, I don't want it,
I don't want it, for it's your name I'd be
calling, and I don't want a universe
where your name is one I couldn't place

I would break it, I swear, a world like that;
I would tear its very foundations and damn its fate because
an infinity of space without you is an abomination, a void.





Heather M. Browne

Pearl Thief

She was a careful study. Learning the currents,
the resting spots of the sea. Where to hunt
the lustrous pearl, hiding
under wave and wind.
Safely asleep within its barnacled bed.

She dove down, searching,
hungry for treasure again and again.
Each time empty handed. Her netted sack limp
and empty.
Dripping dreams upon the shore,
landing into perfect drops of sanded pearls,
beautiful,
but worthless.
Wide awake and ready to be snatched
and strung around her neck,
a golden chain of ocean.

She gave up. Something hard and unfamiliar.
And dragging from the sea, the sun catching
upon her wetted skin, missed
her arms and legs dripping diamonds,
slowly slipping between her fingers,
off her shins.
Treasure lost,
by a careless
thief.

Sunflowers

Sunflowers singed their holy heads,
focused solely on celestial sun,
forgetting their need to drink,
to wash clean their faces dusty dirt,
cool their burning heat,
and draw deeply into parched roots.

They turn their blackened faces to the sun,
drying up the little left,
believing touch souly mattered .
Plead blessing upon their withered seeds.
Missing conception begins within.
Life starts in root
in feeding
in nurture
in love



Pieces

She lost her peace by piece
her voice - her fingered touch.
A longing growing deep.
Blessed in dreams to find her,
for a time.
But hurried life was distracting
and dreams filled with forgetting
to remember.
Crawling into bed no longer aware
of her loss or parts.
Until last night, when her mind was quiet and piece did come.
A glimpse of her smile
her name spoken.
And as she woke,
She found, for the first time in forever,
she could feel her limb.

Scent of Orange

Today I took
but just one breath
And imagined I breathed in you
That slight scent of jasmine, orange
I paused to listen to my fingers, bones
Drinking in you
To see the chemical reaction
The taste upon my tongue

I waited several moments
Open
Available to you
As you claimed I never was
And as my feet began to move
Further south from your northern shores
I passed a grove of fruits, citrus
None, reminding me of you

James Croal Jackson

The Comedian

The comedy club Rob performed at was closed for the next ten hours. He lingered by the door, didn't have a change of clothes. Here's to hoping he'll be able to pay the bills when the bills arrive. At a diner he ordered frozen yogurt. I'm new in town, man. I like it here. They don't have froyo like this in Austin, man!

~~~ooo~~~

I'm like, "hey, Rob, why are we here? I came to Hollywood to work in Hollywood." All laugh heartily at the comment. The slightest ounce of effort roughly equates into borderline sex with a stranger in the middle of a waiting room, casually surrounded by sick and coughing patients seated sporadically, pants soaked and stained.

~~~ooo~~~

Whiskey, vodka, beer - *he had whatever we fancied*. We drank at his place. By noon I was still drinking or asleep on his couch or expertly driving drunk down the 101 to my Koreatown apartment to see the dog, or shower, but otherwise there wasn't much reason to go home. Coffee. My lovely wife.

~~~ooo~~~

Pretty lucky besides being a large "abject alcoholic scumbag." Her words. I killed her drunk while I was drunk and didn't go to jail. She had a closed-casket funeral I don't remember. I felt like I hired a ghost to inhabit my body and it woke me when I could no longer pay the bill. We can hand out fliers to people who pass for a while, you know.

~~~ooo~~~

At last, at long last: acceptance, sweet and brief. My son had a guard escort me out as soon as he caught wind.

~~~ooo~~~

Teach a man to fish and he'll ask, "how are you the manager of this McDonalds, bro?" He did well before. *His karaoke was the best I'd ever heard Def Lep., man.*

~~~ooo~~~

The nurse stopped at Del Taco on his lunch break. Before that he came to my room, hugged me, and left. Because that's how grown men act. The hug was my birthday. It's hard to fathom how a professional can so calmly, even pleasantly, deliver life-changing news. At least provide coffee.



James Croal Jackson

What We Pieced Together About Our Father After His Death

A father needs to have a secret room to do whatever it is that a father does in his secret room, so our father turned the oil-changing pit (six feet deep, eight feet long, three-and-a-half feet wide) in the garage into his secret room. It is covered up by three long wooden boards, the outer two of which he would carefully place on the edges at the pit's opening. The center board he never removed, only shifting just enough to fit himself. He filled his pit with National Geographic magazines dating back to 1936, rudimentary pencil sketches of our mother, dried walnut husks, hideous gremlin statues, various hand tools, and two inscribed World War II-era accordions. He used an aged kerosene lamp to read A Farewell to Arms, the only book we ever caught him reading. If the power went out during a storm, he would manually crank open the garage door, climb into his beloved 1989 red Ford Probe, flip on slick headlights which jutted out from the hood, reverse into the driveway, and park directly beneath the shoddy-looking-but-sturdy plywood canopy he built himself just so he could manually crank the garage door closed and slip into the dark privacy of his oil-changing pit while rain and lightning raged beyond its cozy confines, to do whatever it is that a father does in his secret room.



Dickey's

Dickey was a white-haired humpback with one eye.
His place had a small crowd: old men waiting around the bar for younger women to croon a tune on the old karaoke machine; DJ BBQ, always bringing the hot sauce.
"Bass in a bottle, four dollars," Dickey offered.
His regular went for PBR instead. "A dollar."
Everyone drank slowly. He opened the Bass for himself. He limbered to BBQ, whispered into her ear.
She transferred the mic. He stood beneath the display, waiting for a tune...
He wailed, barked, growled, and howled like a wolf himself.
Patrons sipped, awaited the flood of women.
Dickey kicked his beer. He could sing all night. The beer would still be in a puddle.

Emily Vanston

Clover

In the spring I sow clover
In the garden, with my lover.
Our own small thing: our yard,
A sky starred with clover.
We lie, serene, unguarded,
Each in the other fully known.

In the summer my lover mows
A row through the clover
On which to stroll—
A road through the green.
The air is rich with ruined clover,
And other things, unseen and unknown.

It is autumn, and the clover
Has overgrown the garden,
Reclaimed the yard.
Now the moan of the mower
And the blower sowing hard sound
Cuts me down, runs me over.

Winter has blown in since I found
That I knew her, all along,
That I'd met her, and I'd loved her,
And I'd let her stroll down that road
Through the newly-mown clover
Hand in hand [unseen! unknown!]
With my lover.

Faultless

Faultless,
You must have been disappointed.
You must have protested
To the soundless stars:
Good begets good.
Light, light.
What of this?

Borne on a litter of promises,
Warm and worn,
You must have objected
The rude betrayal,
The thing within
The yawning dark.
No warning, no precedent.

Wrong, all wrong!
You must have cried,
Cajoled,
Insisted:
A mistake has been made.
Please.
Please.

You must have slumped, finally,
Defeated,
Gathered what was yours,
And returned
To the bruised newness
Of your now life.
A mistake has been made.

And yet
And yet...

Strange Material

Strange material
You have rendered.
You have penned
Strange words:

Broken dark things, clenched
In broken coils,
Blood-choked and
Clotted,

Oozing oily slow
Onto the page,
Smeared—your hand
Shaking,

Secreting shadows
From the tunnels
Twisting down
Behind

Your eyes—conducting
This atonal
Symphony
Alone,

Swallowed by this strange
Material
Which you have
Rendered.

Brandon Barrows

Where Everybody Knows Your Name

Nick Collins pushed his way through the pair of swinging doors into the bar, doffed his dark-colored forage cap then wiped the sweat from his forehead onto his uniform jacket's sleeve. It was nice and cool inside and the dimly lit atmosphere of a neighborhood dive suited him perfectly. He grinned to himself and stepped up to the bar.

A paunchy older man with a graying, receding hairline that retained a bit of black around the temples looked up from wiping down a glass and nodded to Nick. The young man took a stool, placed his hat on the bar next to him and asked, "What have you got on tap?"

The bartender pulled out a mug from beneath the bar and returned, "What do you want?"

"Uh," Nick paused. What did he want? "Whatever domestic ale you like's fine," he decided.

The barman grunted as he pulled on a tap beneath the counter, shaking his head in what Nick hoped was amusement rather than derision, then slid a frothing mug towards Nick. He took a long, foamy pull, then let go a heavy sigh of satisfaction. "That's good. What is it?" The older man grunted again, but otherwise did not respond, suddenly very engrossed in cleaning some invisible spot on the bar.

Nick shrugged, took another sip from the beer and swiveled his seat around to get a better look at the room. He hadn't been here before, but had already decided he liked it. The place was empty at this hour, but the small, square tables spaced at regular intervals around the room looked like they could hold quite a few people and Nick judged it would make an excellent new hangout. There was even a pool table along the back wall and a juke box near the end of the bar. What more could a man ask for?

Well, there was one thing. Now that he'd noticed the table, Nick would kill for a couple of other guys to shoot some pool with. He hadn't touched a cue since his long-gone school days, but it was just like riding a bike, right? Even if he was rusty, he'd have a blast just shooting around.

The sound of the doors swinging open again, and booted footsteps on the hardwood floors, turned his head towards the entrance and the sight that greeted him split his lips into his brightest smile. This was turning out to be one terrific place!

"Well, I'll be damned!" Nick rose from his stool and spread his arms wide in welcome as he approached the two men who'd just entered. "Jules Hemmingway and Pete Montoya! How the Hell are ya, guys?"

The newcomers, Hemmingway clean-shaven, tall and muscled like a boxer and Montoya mustachioed, of average height and above average weight, mirrored Nick's grin as the three exchanged hearty handshakes and greetings. Like Nick, the men wore the uniforms of flight captains, though theirs were of different outfits than Nick's.

"Imagine running into the two of you here, of all places." Nick motioned to the bartender to bring drinks for his friends as he carried his own to a table and sat down. "God, I haven't seen either of you since we graduated. What's it been now, seven years?" Nick nodded in answer to his own question and, without waiting for any other response, continued. "What have you been up to?"

Hemmingway and Montoya exchanged a glance before the latter sat down and said "Oh, same as you, I suppose. How's the brew here?" There was something odd in the two men's mannerisms, but joy at seeing his friends pushed that detail to the back of Nick's mind. The barkeep appeared, further distracting Nick, and set down a pair of mugs then shuffled off without a word. "Thanks!" Nick called after him before turning back to answer Montoya, "See for yourself."



After a preliminary taste, the newcomers deemed the beer satisfactory and the three men sipped in silence for an awkward moment. Hemmingway was the first to crack. "So, you hang out here, Nicky?"

Nick tipped back his mug, finishing off the dregs and smacking his lips happily. "Nope, first time here, actually. The place I normally hang around's getting kinda old. Hey!" He jumped up from the table and pointed towards the rear wall of the room. "You guys wanna shoot around a bit?"

Trusting his friends to follow, Nick headed to the back and racked up the balls for a new game. Montoya and Hemmingway arrived, looked over the small collection of cues on the wall and selected their sticks. Montoya said, "Jules and I'll take turns playing you, alright?"
"Sure." Nick selected his own cue and asked, "Wanna put something down to make it interesting?"

Hemmingway dismissed the idea. "Nah, we're all friends. Why complicate it?" That didn't sound like the Hemmingway Nick remembered; back in school, his buddy had been mad for any sort of competition. Nick filed it away as something else he didn't want to think about just now.

Instead, Nick nodded as they lagged down for the break and won. Hunched down and lining up his cue, he was surprised by the interruption of a female voice from somewhere above their heads, skewing his shot and making a terrible break. "Collins!"

Barely a moment later, the irritated voice boomed out again. "Nick Collins, you respond now!"
Nick's cheeks reddened as his friends gave him questioning looks. "Um, I'm here, ma'am."
The voice's tone changed from irritated to mocking. "And 'here' is down in the holo-room, am I right?"
"Yes," Nick gulped, feeling his face burn even hotter. Hemmingway and Montoya looked on curiously, wondering what had interrupted their barely-begun game.

"A split shift means you have to come back, you know. Now get your keister back up here! You've got drinks to serve and we've got impatient, thirsty passengers on this starship!" Nick sighed and hung his head, "Sorry, guys. Maybe we can pick this up some other time." He quietly added, "Computer, end simulation Collins zero-one-one-nine." At his command first his friends, then the bar itself, flickered, blurred then faded from existence entirely to be replaced by a room of equal size, featureless except for the thousands of tiny projector lenses sprouting from every surface.

"And you better be in the right uniform!" his shift-supervisor shrieked over the comm.
Steward Collins, hat in hand and shoulders slumped, trudged towards the waiting door and his dinner shift. "Yes, ma'am."

Dave Gregg

Travel

She packed
a magazine!
for overnight
I saw her!
And wonder,
“Why this issue?”
Am I not enough
to occupy her
every waking?
Does my presence
invite such dread?
My insulted ego
and I storm
into the bedroom
She greets me
with a smile
and packs a
book as well

Poets Warren

Is this when you cry?
Where you tumble
down the hillside
beg and plead for
another lazy day
one more wasted minute?
A week you’ll wisely
Imbibe sobriety?
This isn’t the return window-
your tickets’ punched
and sad to say
poets do go to hell
Say hello to your friends
exchange a word or two
but be forewarned
the readings last forever

Birth Place

In the nineteenth century
the delta was a swamp
layered with rich life forms
Rife with great white oak
but commerce triumphed
and the swamp was drained
Great levees were constructed
cotton was soon the new King
what the levee could not contain
Was music born which rode
the neck of 12 string guitars
away to Chicago and Detroit
Westward to dusty Texas
out to California and beyond
their names became legend
The Pattons and Johnsons
Collins and Kings and Smiths
Whether it was called swamp
or jump or swing or electric
or West Coast or soul the blues
Could not be picked like cotton

Blues Noise

When the blues are played dirty (as must be) and they ricochet off
the brick walls and echo over the levee linger long enough to join
chorus of field hollers so long ago you must hear the broken things
in the blues the anger and lust, rage and disgust the need and sweet joy
the staggered stanzas of Memphis Minnie singing with Lonnie’s guitar
Like the current clergy of Cray, Guy and John Lang we tap our toes
Clap our hands in weathered delights and homage and grateful prayers

The NEW

Softly she dabs
at crimson stars
her hand towel
bright with glow
you never say
where you find
them but keep
a tidy sky



James E. Guin

The Marriage Test

Placing the handset back to the telephone base, Tim looked across the room at Meili. She was sitting next to the window waiting for his response. His vision switched from Meli to the window. Outside, steam rose from the concrete parking lot. The last bit of gray in the sky was fading into light blue. Returning his gaze to Meili, Tim smiled, but confusion clouded his mind. How could he explain this to her? The last three phone conversations had been a bizarre case of Deja Vu.

While black clouds gathered outside the window, the first lady Tim spoke with on the phone was friendly. With charismatic Southern charm, she chatted about the reconstruction she was having done on her aging home. But after she walked away from the hammering and sawing noises, she shifted into her Justice of the Peace persona.
"Sir, I have to ask you three questions before I can agree to perform the ceremony," she said.
"Yes ma' am," Tim replied.
"Are you both over the age of 16?"

Her voice was mechanical. She could probably tell by the tone quality and control of Tim's voice he was much older than sixteen, but he understood the law required procedures.
"Yes ma' am. We're much older than sixteen," he said feeling confident he was going to pass this test.
After all, if the marriage test was so difficult, how did so many people get married?
"Are you related?" she asked with the same mechanical voice, undoubtedly expecting the usual 'no' answer.
"No ma'am. There's no chance of that," Tim answered with a slight chuckle.
He was from Mississippi, and Meili was born and bred in Malaysia.

The third question caught him off guard.
"Are you both of the same race?"
At first, the question didn't register. He had never thought about Meili in terms of being of a different race. Culture? Sure he had thought a lot about the difference in their cultures. But race? What was race in this age of internet based genealogy and DNA research? He wanted to say "yes, we are both of the human race," but he knew what she meant. White, black, yellow, or brown. After all, this was the Deep South. In his storm of thought and confusion, all he could manage to say was 'no.'
"I advise you to seek counseling before you do this, sir..."

Her lecture trailed off into indecipherable sounds. Wondering what race had to do with marriage in legal terms, he couldn't hear her or maybe his subconscious didn't want to understand. Lady Justice wore a blindfold, and this was November 1997, the end of the 20th century. In the United States laws pertaining to horse drawn carriages, blood sacrifices, and tying alligators to fire hydrants had been taken off the books. Hanging up the phone, Tim looked at the woman he loved and tried to smile. Outside the window, rain slammed onto the concrete parking lot. Placing his finger under the next Justice of the Peace listing in the phone book, he dialed Lady Justice #2.

Same conversation, but this time while she encouraged counseling, he thought about how "racially" mixed Louisiana had always been. The Cajun ancestry was a mixture of British, French, Italian, Native American, and French Creole. "Everything," some boasted. And jazz, Louisiana's contribution to the world, was a mixture of gospel, blues, and European instruments and music? Gumbo was a combination of everything but the kitchen sink?

Tim hung up the phone and studied his white, reddish-white, or reddish-white with some pink hand. He looked at Meili. Her skin was yellow, tannish-yellow, or dark tannish-yellow. Turning his attention to the window, he noticed that the rain outside had slackened to a light sprinkle and the sky was turning from black to a dark gray.

Placing his index finger in the phone book under Lady Peace #3, he dialed the number. Same conversation, but this time she mentioned the Bible.
"God's word advises against it," she said.

He wanted to ask 'aren't we all descendants from one man?' and 'through Abraham all peoples would be blessed,' but she sounded like she was confident in her attitude and knowledge toward race and marriage. He didn't think she would respect his thoughts on the matter. She certainly didn't respect his race.

As Tim hung up the phone, he looked at his Meili who was patiently awaiting an explanation from him. She had said 'yes' to his marriage proposal, but he knew she needed some insight into marriage practices in the United States. Prior to making these phone calls, he had told her all they had to do was get married. What would he say to her now? We can't get married because the great state of Louisiana doesn't allow two humans of a different race to espouse. "We failed the test."

Outside the window, the rain had stopped and the sky altered between gray and light blue. Returning his index finger to the Tangipahoa phone book listing for Justice of the Peace #4, he looked at his wife-to-be and then dialed the number. "Hello," a female voice at the other end of the line said.

So he wouldn't waste her time or his, Tim rushed into "my girlfriend and I are both over the age of sixteen, we're not related, and we're of a different race. Will you marry us?"

He had managed to get it all out without any interruptions. There was no sound on the other end. In the silence he looked at Meili. The sun sent one huge ray shining through the window. Meili's skin radiated. She looked human.

"I just need to ask you one question, sir," she said. Knowing what was coming, he replied, with a disappointed. "Yes, ma'am

"Do you have fifteen dollars?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Come on over."

Ken L. Jones

A Sequence of Rainbows

The first spring day is blissful serenity
Fresh water from the mountains
Brought down unto me
After a winter that has played an ape
Until all was so very pale
That I can now hardly recall it
A neon of birds wreathed
In a wispy saxophone solo
That could put babies into an oak and honey sleep
Once beckoned by the nearly silent embrace
Of a stiffly starched dream chamber
Where even books of poetry
Become the apples of Eden
Painted in strokes I no longer remembered
And each more puzzling than the last.

Talk a New Language

The light and color of the blossoming trees
Is chrome and orange
Pale stars of fruit in explosions of color
And while a fragmentary nightingale sings
Sounding over and over like an incantation
Only quite recently hewn
I stand still transfixed by a morning
That is like a sermon
My thoughts forever coming and going
Through the long closed gate of muffled paintings
Like wooden shoes that fade away
Until they emerge in cornfields where
Even the very shadows there
Turn to the oldest of gold
With very little provocation.

Ken L. Jones

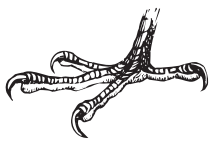
Beyond Velvet

The day breaks beautifully in the piety of weary boulders
As I am summoned by the fields to sojourn in the ancient there
Amidst the meadows of purple flowers at the height of harvest time
Where all I have to store up for the winter is these words
I've labored so hard to rhyme.

Old Orchard Slow Melt

Early autumn is brass toned beneath the sunflowers
And the fallen acorns and boysenberries announce
It is coming on now and hard
And here where the frogs jump like rocking horses in my twilit garden
As these purple toned longer days whisper
That it is now okay for me to linger
In these tender illusions that have no dimmer switch
And while I bask in this failing light
I find myself dreaming ahead to December days
Of the gingerbread man's apothecary
That the nearby turquoise drug store soon will be
It seems another year has evaporated on me
And now I find myself leaning even harder on this walking stick of mine
And yet my mind is still a place of great invention
A three ring circus that refuses to decline
And as true darkness draws tight around me
I retreat to my hearth to light my pinecone piled high fireplace
For a long relaxed afghaned nap that might well last throughout the entire night
And onward to the break of day

Trembling With a Strobe's Tint



Crows fly off an unrecognizable cliff
The click, click, click of the red wine ballet
Is like a romantic train ride to old movies
And while the scriptures of the rain
Come down making an angel faced
Brazier lit courtyard out of the lingering
Robert Frost countryside as it gives birth
To heirloom apples that though told
And retold are always new
And which is why I always set a place for them
At my poet's table grateful to hear of their time worn journeys
Which always have the ring of truth about them even as they flurry.

Travis Lee

The Traveler

The traveler pulled out a chair and sat down across from me. I looked up, "Tonight's the night?" The traveler was quiet. He was here before me, and I always figured he'd be here long after I left. Two years ago, he pulled the chair out like he did tonight, ordered the bottle like he did tonight, and took a sip, careful not to let his beard fall into his drink.

Two years, and I guess I don't need an answer. Tonight is the night. I raised my glass. Most expats paid the high prices for imported drinks, unable to trust something clear from an unmarked bottle. But the traveler went right for the rice wine, unmixed, unchased.

He tapped his glass against mine, emptied it in one go. I watched him. Then I emptied my own. I grimaced, I couldn't help myself. They say Chinese rice wine is an acquired taste, but that doesn't mean everyone can acquire it.

"I can buy you a chaser if you'd like," the traveler said, "or perhaps you'd prefer a massage, to ease your pain?" *It was just our first round.* He filled our glasses again, "you said that on our first meeting," a smile forming somewhere behind his beard. "It was no more believable then than it is now. Would you like to say something else?"

I lifted my glass. The second shot went down no easier than the first. I grimaced again. "You need more practice," the traveler said, "but I suspect you are not interested in rice wine. You want to ask me why. Why now? Why not two years ago? Or two years hence?"

"Actually, I want to ask why the lake." I waited. The beard or the traveler's skill, you could never read his face. I glanced at my full glass, and raised it.

After the traveler had refilled our glasses, I said, "It's just a lake. There's lots of lakes here."

"None like this lake."

"So what about it?"

"It's where she went." He tapped his glass, looking into it. "It was supposed to be my gap year, when I met her. I was young back then. She was pushing thirty."

"That's still young."

"For a woman in China, to be that age and unmarried . . . I thought I understood what it meant, to love. I didn't." He put his hand on top of the glass. "She told me she was going to the lake, and that's what she did."

"Sure, you messed up, but she had her choice too. Like you said, you were young, and besides, it was so long ago. Why now?"

"I have traveled far too long." He took his hand off the glass, "but it's over. I knew that two years ago, and waiting has made it no less obvious. Were it not for you, my journey might have been eternal."

"I can't be the first person you talked to here."

"You're the first who understands. You came here for a gap year yourself. How long has it been now? A year in China, and then you go back to what? To spend your only life doing something you don't want to do, all to purchase stuff you don't need? What sort of life is that?" He let those words settle. Then he sighed, "Well. It is late."

"You don't have to do this"

"It's late it's late," he muttered, reaching inside his shirt. "Why the lake?" He was fingering something under his shirt. He pulled out a necklace and set it on the table. "The lake is not where I began. It's where I understood."

He left. I drank a few more glasses of rice wine. *It got easier with each glass.* After a while, I picked up the necklace, a ring of jade surrounded an off-white gem, hanging from a long strand of hemp. I put it on and left.

It's been five years since my journey began. Sometimes I think of the lake. Sometimes I think of the life I turned away from. Mostly I think of the traveler, and the journey that never ends.



Judi Calhoun



Bob The Bear

Eliza Horn

Saving the World with Frozen Coffee

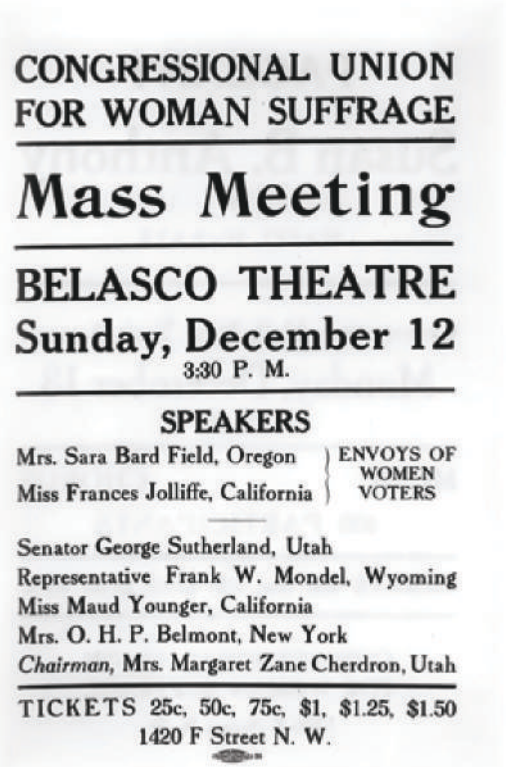
I had always wondered what would happen to frat guys. Occasionally, on the weekends in college, when I was bored of girls' night and inspired by some sappy rom-com about finding love where you'd least expect, I would drag my friends to Vanderbilt's frat row. The houses were adorned with signs to announce the theme "CEOs and Admin-hos" or "GI Joes and Barbie-Hos." Really, anything "ho" related was deemed acceptable.

The floors were sticky with spilled Natty Light, the base would be throbbing, and people were either grinding or puking. I couldn't decide which I preferred, so I often just stood, observing the mating rituals of the frat house, mentally composing my next sociology paper: "The frat boy adorns himself in a pastel polo, khaki shorts, and Ray Ban sunglasses to attract the attention of the opposite sex."

I had always wondered what would happen to such creatures once we graduated. Now I knew. The country club was the new frat house and I would be serving them frozen coffee, asking if they wanted whip cream. Why? Because I wanted to help people.

At one point, I believed that my motivation was noble. At least I thought it was. Walking through the halls of my pristine university, I discussed the failings of society, hypothesizing the solution to poverty and food insecurity. If only more people were determined to help, to do something, maybe then things would be better. And that was the most concrete goal I had as I walked across the stage and accepted my diploma. I would do something.

I had dreams of meeting legislatures, giving rousing talks about inequality, writing editorials, what most first jobs look like. But, I also had to pay rent. So, I accepted a position as an Assistant to the CEO at a Houston nonprofit. It was more removed and less prestigious than I had imagined. But, still, I was helping people that helped people and that was something.


CONGRESSIONAL UNION
FOR WOMAN SUFFRAGE

Mass Meeting

BELASCO THEATRE
Sunday, December 12
3:30 P. M.

SPEAKERS

Mrs. Sara Bard Field, Oregon
Miss Frances Jolliffe, California
} ENVOYS OF WOMEN VOTERS

Senator George Sutherland, Utah
Representative Frank W. Mondel, Wyoming
Miss Maud Younger, California
Mrs. O. H. P. Belmont, New York
Chairman, Mrs. Margaret Zane Cherdron, Utah

TICKETS 25c, 50c, 75c, $1, $1.25, $1.50
1420 F Street N. W.

Plus, the CEOs of nonprofits were often astounding and dedicated people. The summer after my sophomore year of college, I interned with the National Coalition for the Homeless. The CEO, Michael, had been homeless. He would stop to talk to every person on the street, giving away the majority of his salary.

The following summer, I interned with the AAUW. The leader of Policy and Government Relations Department did not eat, breathe, speak, and (I suspect) sleep without talking about women's issues. Occasionally, she would offer to buy us lunch if we picked up Potbellys for her. The order was always the same, ham sandwich on white bread with a chocolate shake. She would eat at her desk, eyes jumping from her computer screen to the news, waiting for someone to mention paycheck fairness. Her hair was often tangled and her face was blotchy. She never looked healthy or even particularly happy, or, at least, not the type of happiness that most would understand.

But, Kyle was a different type of nonprofit CEO. As his assistant, I quickly learned his preferences. He loved young women, cameras, and talking with his hands. He disliked parking his own car, human resources, and providing raises.

After watching him present at an event during the first few weeks of the position, I mistook his passion for his audience as his passion for the mission. After a few more months, I quickly corrected this assumption.

Kyle had developed other schemes to crawl his way into the spotlight. We held unnecessary press conferences and bi-weekly lunches that would recycle our talking points. One of the staff's least favorite ploys was the "human-trafficking reality show." The basic premise was that Kyle would swarm a local strip club, flanked by a team of our policy and research staff, to rescue human-trafficking victims, with no legal authority. While he tried courting a number of television stations, this never really got further than staff meeting.

Once, we all watched a video of a young boy discussing his frustration with food insecurity. When we turned the lights on, Kyle's eyes were moist and I questioned my understanding if his motivation. Maybe he did care. Maybe, beneath his desire to network and go to expensive restaurants with corporate CEOs, and be quoted in the newspaper, maybe he really did care, at least a little bit. A few weeks later, he mentioned that he had cried during "The Office" series finale and the whole experience became a bit more hallow.

Regardless of his motivation, Kyle was the CEO and Kyle would try to keep this organization afloat. So, on the day of our annual fundraising golf tournament, Kyle paced across the lobby, sporting his white embroidered polo shirt that barely shielded his fleshy abdomen from cascading over his cargo shorts, revealing his oddly hairless calves.

He was on a perpetual diet which was, from what I observed, eating a salad for lunch and anything any other time of day (*and never exercising*). This approach to improved his own health also opitimized how he approached managing, which was why, similar to his waistline, the organization's debt was ever-expanding. So, while donors believed that were arriving to a sunny afternoon of golf, the organization was teetering on the edge of bankruptcy and Kyle viewed this event as our route to survival.

Soon, his nervous pacing fueled his jubilation as the news stations arrived and, more importantly, their cameras.



After I fulfilled my duties at the registration table, I was assigned to Hole 18 to distribute frozen coffee. I sat under a tent with two of our staff attorneys and we tried to determine when the ideal time to remove the frozen coffee from the coolers, attempting to strike a balance between melted and totally frozen.

The first golf cart stopped. Two balding men with hairy knuckles got out to glower into the small cup. They mentioned the weather, that we were pretty, and made whip cream innuendo jokes that we were supposed to pretend that we didn't understand.

As the afternoon wore on, the coffee began to melt and bugs swarmed. The jokes from the golfers got worse, or maybe they were simply worse because they were all the same. After the last golf cart passed us by, we packed up and returned to the clubhouse for the auction to begin.

The crowd was small, tired from a day in the sun, and Kyle was sweaty and desperate. The first few items went quickly. The beach house and Rockets tickets were snatched up. But the cellulose sucking gift certificate that Kyle positioned as "a great gift for the woman in your life" didn't have any takers.

The golfers sat, sipping their whiskey and staring as Kyle paced across the dining room.

His exuberant speeches, verbose phrasing, and exaggerated hand motions could not penetrate the crowd. He called audience members out by name, trying to cash in on any personal connection or at least publicly embarrass them into bidding.

Half way through, one of the women in argyle knee socks, drunk off cosmos, and with a profile that most of us had hypothesized was a result of some charitable implants, grabbed the microphone. She turned to Kyle, exclaiming, "You're not doing it right!" She stumbled into the middle of the dining room floor. "Can't we all just give a little more to help?" She puffed out her lips in a pout.

"It's for the children!" Kyle said from behind her, trying to determine how to reclaim the microphone. "What's the next item?" She called back to Kyle, stumbling a bit. "A dinner and wine pairing at Mockingbird Bistro," he said, it his best television announcer voice. "And to sweeten this a bit," she said, circling the room, gently grazing her hand across the gray and white heads of hair. "I will join you for dinner."

Kyle looked around the room at his staff. I wondered if he was calculating whether he should be embarrassed - or who should be auctioned off next.

There was an ongoing commentary within the nonprofit community in Houston. They called us Kyle's harem. The staff was all under 35 and ninety-percent female. Even people in our building noticed. When I first started at the organization, an old man entered our office and asked, "how many girls are in here?" He had this look in his eyes as he glanced around the lobby, like he was staring into a jar of jellybeans, trying to guess the number. And we were like jellybeans. Perhaps we had different colors, but we generally had the same shape. We were indistinguishable.

Perhaps this was what was most upsetting about the day and really, my whole experience with nonprofits. Ultimately, it was about selling. It was about sitting in the thick Gulf Coast humidity, surrounded by insects. It was about laughing at jokes we didn't want to hear, pretending this was the reason I had studied late into the night at college, that what we did mattered - that we could save the world with frozen coffee.

Sam Barbee

Sudden Fiction

Summer rain rattles the downspouts.
I listen to Puccini, perfect music
for Sunday morning. From the window
I watch grass swell, so eager
to turn green.
My daughter, fresh
from napping, joins me. Rain fails
to interest her. Young butterfly,
she dances yet another version
of ballet - up and down, to and fro,
untrained pirouette - a big-girl
across rose-colored carpet.

I warn her not to dance too close
to the brick hearth. She collapses,
contemplating soot, and holds each palm
toward white oak cinders, then touches
a brass poker, rattles it against
a matching broom. "But, there's no fire."
I pull her close and explain flame

is not today's danger.
"That hearth is rough and hard."
Above the mantel between fresh red candles,
a landscape hangs - full of thin men
in red coats and black hats, riding
white stallions. Hounds cluster around
their polished boots. With bugle sounds,
a foxhunt begins.
She assures me
she will be careful
if only I will let her dance.

Twisting from me, I watch her blonde hair
twirl, frail arms weaving. I reach around
and close the fire screen's mesh.
Cold andirons wait, ornamented
by black owls with glass eyes, eager
for a chilled morning in a February
yet to come.

Sam Barbee

Solar Eclipse

This is not an Easter morning, yet
the flaxen moon guarding my tomb of guilt
has rolled back, and hovers above the swale.

Noontime shadows constrict to picket fences.
Snowbirds consider distant oak branch-call.
Clocks chime against midmorning dissonance.

As children scramble drawing papers,
their fat orange suns defining their blue day
my despair exhales, at ease snuffing remaining light.

The cock cannot crow in this ill-timed dark.
Blinded hawk, beak and talons prone,
discerns his choices on the breeze, but

lags at the edge of free will's breadth.
I relive the gilded night you welcomed me, but
now you conceal your face in the midday dusk.

Strike your candle: illuminate my dim crossing.
Re-offer red wine that douses more than thirst.
Be flint to fuse drowsy passion in our cupped palms.

Hybrid

After blight, our chestnut forests
rotted. Their shadows now emerge,
suffering in furniture and mirror frames,
within unconsecrated slights of legend.

A ring of scientists now cross-breed
remaining Chestnuts with a Chinese genus,
conjuring a stubborn breed, not quite clones,
but another noble effort resistant to demise.

Wooden spooled crib where our grandchild lies
hosts our echo, a remnant thrashing
versus what life will offer, wandering on
with the deceased against what wind strikes down.

So much put asunder, crumbling stumps
rootless and toothless beneath heaven
in a forest felled in microscopic confusion,
among graves where the mighty stood.

A Validation Forbidding Mourning

Intoning the grim morning,
thunder rumbles in the distance.
I cozy to you this deceitful dawn,
filling our interim while lightening
slings its illumination across
these naked bodies as we embrace.

I melt into you, limb by limb,
fingers laced inside dark hair.
Chests close. Even passion's glisten
cannot separate our heartbeats,
yet I know I must leave you here
to conquer what shrieks by day.

Both of us will struggle with worlds
where sunlight succumbs to shadow,
veiling the toll on our untainted love -
whispers stray and diminish intent,
clouding those transparencies we seek,
eroding the sweet bond of our mercies.

Hurry dusk. Know I long for you and
hearken for all provided then,
reaffirming there is that pristine chamber,
a circle to enclose ourselves, and weave
another conclusion, another recollection
of musings as the predawn bellows fire.

Sam Barbee

Trick Photography

Saturday night, we gathered
before the black and white television
to watch a movie: sometimes
a western saga, others a biblical classic.
Clad in plaid robe and puppy slippers,
clutching a favorite bear, I cuddled
beside my mother, a middle-aged nymph
perched on a half-couch. She smiled at
my sagacious dad, secure in his recliner,
white-socked feet raised, sipping coffee.

Always an inevitable scene: the hero
would take flight, a mountain collapse,
or Moses part the sea.
I asked my mother "is that real?"
and in turn she asked my dad.
"Trick photography" he responded -
his explanation to many things
we watched, needing context,
in terms he knew. Grinding his pipe,
"They can do anything with that movie magic."

When my mother became ill, cures
left out of the conversation, easy answers
dwindled. I never heard the surgeon
lay it out for him, but my mother stared
to him as my dad stared back to me.
He found a comfortable chair knowing
no one would debate fairness, no final frame
savior would cruise in to rescue his damsel.
The hero had a last dogged scene to act out,
one infused with affect he could never explain.

Renee Rivers

Horse Training

"You can't train for riding a horse like Pink," Beth said that day after I dismounted and shakily handed her the reins. As a middle-aged, suburban mother, I should have known better, but my friend Beth is the closest thing I know to a horse whisperer. And, at times, I don't have a lot of sense, horse or otherwise. That probably explains why I rode a psychotic horse along the cactus-lined drop-off of the Mogollon Rim on an otherwise lovely fall day with Beth's husband, their friend Brighty and my thirteen-year-old daughter.

The horse's name was Pink. Pink Floyd—a spirited and skittish horse named for a British Rock band—was it the mad look in his eye? Or, the fact that he was white with lots of pink on his face? But I knew, watching the back of my daughter's head as she bounced along ahead on a gentler horse that young girls weren't so different from wild horses. They both could be strong-willed, reactive, unpredictable.

As I rode, or rather hung on, I tried not to think of Pink Floyd songs like: "Brain Damage," "Waiting for the Worms," "Goodbye Blue Sky." You get the picture.

After a day wrangling the difficult horse, I asked Beth, "Why did you give me the wild one when Brighty's such an accomplished rider?" Brighty (by-the-way, who names their kid for a Grand Canyon mule?) was lanky, gorgeous and a good storyteller. Like a lot of women of her background, she had years of English show jumping behind her.

Hoisting a sweaty saddle, Beth said, "Because, Floyd needs a strong, calm hand. Brighty has training, but her strength's not in her core. For what you lack in training, you've got the presence to handle Floyd. You can't train for that."

You can't train for that. Really?

She explained that Floyd was a roping horse traumatized by chute training. And, he didn't like men. Her husband, Dan—in trying to establish dominance with Floyd—had tipped that balance too far, spooking him to the point where Dan couldn't get near Floyd without making him nervous.

"So you gave him to *me*?" I asked, rubbing an aching shoulder. "I think I dislocated my shoulder trying to hang on." With a bad knee, I wasn't able to hang on with legs the way most riders do. I had to cross hold with my left hand on the saddle and my right leg, saving my sore knee for signaling pressure. It wasn't perfect, but it worked.

"Dan and Brighty said you handled Floyd fine. You never got out of presence. That's what animal work requires: using your weaknesses to your advantage— staying in charge."

When I was a girl, my best friend, Allison and I used to pretend we were in charge. We'd sneak into her neighbor's barn and ride his horses bareback.

We were warned to stay away by our mothers, but the horses were too much of a draw. I don't know if it was the warnings or the general wariness all young girls should develop, but we were wary of the man to whom the horses belonged. But, we weren't deterred.

We'd sneak into the barn with carrots, feeding the horses from our pale, extended hands. We studied books about how Indians rode bareback. We'd pet, brush, and rein the horses. And at dusk we'd lead them to a stack of hay bales. Stepping up from the bales, we'd slide onto the horses' broad bare backs and glide through the trodden pasture, dreaming. We'd tell, years later, how getting bucked off into the hard dust never stopped us. Until the accident.

Allison worked in a stable after college. During a lightening storm, she was bringing horses back for stabling and hers spooked. Rearing back, the saddle horn caught in her mouth. I don't need to describe the kind of destructive momentum a half a ton of thunder-spooked animal, a broken leather-bound steel horn, and a rock-strewn trail can wreak on a young woman's body. Allison almost didn't make it. Locked into a study program overseas, I sent letters, told her stories over the phone her mother held to her ear as she lay unconscious, her swollen head and face held together in a cocoon of bandaging. *I tried not to cry. We'd always told each other cowgirls didn't, anyway.*

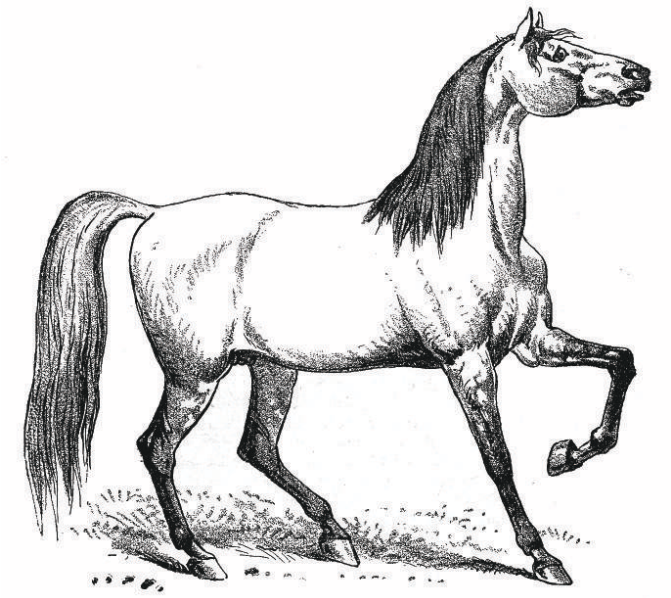
Allison recovered, for the most part. When I got married, she took off for the Grand Canyon instead of coming to my wedding. I remember feeling hollow, wondering, where did we grow apart? Was it when I didn't know what to say when they removed the bandages? Was it the fiancé I had and she didn't? Was it the time that had lapsed since our horse years? Perhaps Allison, like Pink, had just had enough. Perhaps what life asked of them wasn't what they wanted.

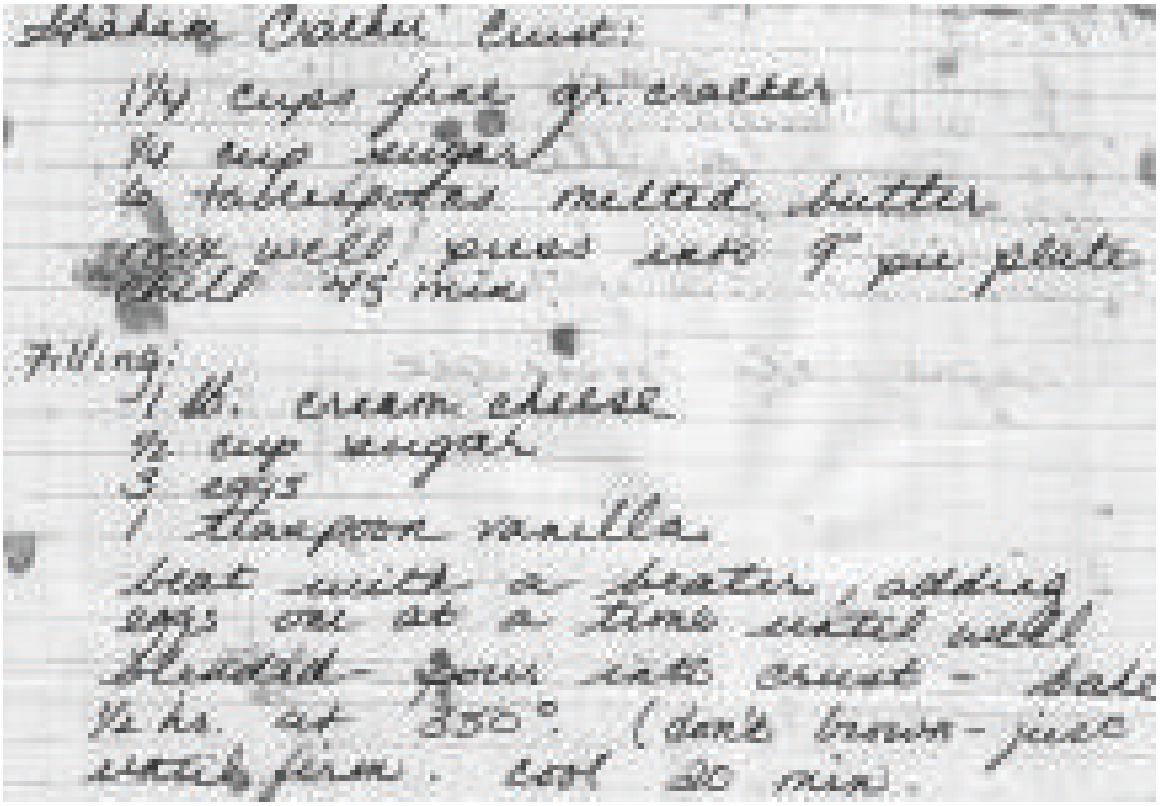
Rubbing my shoulder on the drive home, I watched my daughter looking across the mesas and realized how little time we spent with horses, how few years we had left before she'd be grown. I shuddered to think how she'd never-so-much- as fallen from a bike, let alone a horse. "How'd you like the ride today?" I asked.

"Oh, mom. It's so cool! If you only knew how much I want a horse."

"I know. I know," was all I could say.

As the highway descended through a mesa and grasslands rose behind us, I thought about what horses have given and taken from us. *It's not the kind of thing you can train for.*





Amber Lucik

A Method for Monday Mornings

Eyes shut in the instant before impact and you have just enough time to wonder what it was that you were seeking before your alarm convinces you it never really mattered. Awake, arise, alight into the kitchen to find a map on the table filled with all of the words you have ever spoken. Beneath it, filled to the very limit of legibility, another map of all of the words you have never spoken. Even as you stand there, more words amass. What makes you unique is not the strange patterns of letters, your own personal measurements in an impossible wardrobe; what makes you unique is your disinterest in the cartographer or in my/your/his/her/its/our/their methods. In the maps themselves or their manner of morphing. Unlike the rest of us. Frivolous fools (you'd think if you thought of such things), who grasp our maps tightly at all times, bring them to bed with us, bathe them in our showers, cherish them on our blogs, driven half-mad and more desperate with the need to compare them with each new person we meet, seeking always the places of overlap and exception, filled with such a yeoman's yearning for connection or, more accurately, validation that we accomplish precious little else in our lives. "Pedestrian," you'd say, not even bothering to look at the new marker emerging, such a tedious balancing of accounts. But as you brew your coffee, you do finally wonder about the fate of all of the words you think but do not say. After your first sip, you take out a sheet of paper and begin to jot them down.

Bill Melton



Venice Morning

Ah, Venice,
Your towering ancient walls,
Fortresses to hold in the past
And stave off the modern.
The sights, smells and tastes
Assail the senses.
Unchanged for these centuries.
Stately gondolas
Still plow your waterways
Which rise and fall with the tide,
Whose prows rise haughtily in silence
Aloof to those whose engines roar.
Amid the clamor of countless tongues,
Venetian people
Share the streets with all,
But retreat behind walls
As ancient as the stone hewn streets,
Pull massive old shutters closed
To blot out the modern world.
Shopkeepers
For their ancient livelihood
Open the same doors and stalls
That has opened for centuries
And show the world beautiful wares of
Gold, crystal and lace,
Still lovingly formed
By craftsmen's hand
Instead of machine.
Their windows sparkle
Bidding you to enter, see and buy.
Narrow streets
Huddle between the walls
Hardly room for two to meet
And pass.
They grudgingly give passage
To those who know the maze,
The secret of where they go,
A trap for the unwary
Who carelessly wander into their labyrinth
Ah, Grand Canal,
Mother of all the others,
She feeds them with her source,
Clothed in aqua
But bejeweled by the sunlight
That plays upon her ripples
As clean as the morning shower
With the salt smell that tantalizes
The lungs and nose,
Adding to the appetite
That seems insatiable;
Teased by the smell of fresh baked bread
Or fish in open stalls
And a thousand other aromas that waft
In the cool fresh air.
San Marco Square,
Whose buildings are arms
That open to the sea,
Welcoming the traders of the world
Unchanged since the era
When wooden ships came plowing in,
Dropping their sails in salute
To this grand city.
A thousand pigeons
Flit from here to there,
Their iridescent feathers flash
As they glide just above
The heads of visitors.
On side streets,
Silent sometimes for a moment,
There is peace and solitude.
As in the distance
Bells peal momentarily
And then die.
Or the voices of someone,
Who perhaps, in a moment of happiness,
Sings a verse from some unknown song,
Its meaning clear
In a foreign language.
You have caught my imagination
Far exceeding my grandest expectations
Of what you would be.
And I madly grasp at the memory
Of the sliver moon at midnight
Peering into countless open squares
To the morning sunlight
Bathing the city in golden light
And everything between.
I burn you in my mind
So, at future times
I can retrieve you
And again savor your
Flavors.

Bill Melton

Seashell

Restless sea,
Relentless in your search
For the boundaries of your existence,
A blue-gray line marks
Where the horizon begins,
For it is you who tells the sky
How low it may dip.
Tirelessly,
Your frothy fingers reach for the shore,
Cascading in a desperate grasp
For something to cling to and,
Failing,
Slide eternally backward
Into depths unknown.
Or, playfully
Depositing a shell
On fresh washed sand.
For a moment, letting it lay
Then snatching it away
Before someone can take it.
Each wave rises
Somehow different from all others,
One tripping upon itself
Long before reaching shore;
Another pounds the sand
Falling exhausted from its swim;
Another, meeker,
Quietly slips upon the sand
Without fanfare and disappears.
But each one,
Individually mark the spot
Of their advance.
With a shell,
Different color sand
Or some other treasure
So the next to follow
Will know their limit.
Your language,
Spoken to those who love you
And are nurtured by your being;
Pulsating throbs to human ears
But secrets to your friends;
Telling tiny sandpipers
That scurry along the water edge
How far the next wave will advance
So they will never
Wet their feet,
Or the pelicans
Who skim the undulating waves
Just inches from the surface
Yet never touch it,
You speak your secret to them
As well.
A few shells
I took from you today,
Crafted by artists with
Perfect color, shape and pattern;
Taught by the mother of life.
The first one,
Deposited at my feet
As I stood spellbound at your shore,
Seeking in you
Something for myself
And, finding it somehow
In the shell you left behind.

Hong Kong (Fragrant Harbor)

Sparkling jewel of the
South China Sea,
A gem, surrounded by diamonds
That flashes with the dancing waves.
Your sultry haze
Conceals for a moment
Victoria Peak, standing guard
Over your ancient harbor.
The rushing commerce
Conducted by your millions
In frantic haste;
On the towering spires
That millions call home.
Then, at nature's whim
The soft warm breezes
Pull back the hazy veil
To reveal you clearly.
Everywhere, there sparkles
Brightness and beauty,
Every color of the rainbow
All meshed together by the lucky
Reds and yellows of the Orient.
Your people,
Though small in size,
So large in stature,
Their relentless determination
To succeed today,
Just as their ancestors, ages ago,
Fought just to survive.
Hong Kong!
Your roots penetrate history

Bill Melton

Hong Kong (Fragrant Harbor), cont...

And intertwine with the Egyptians,
Aztec's, Greek's and Romans,
Each leaving a path
Of beauty and mystery
For future cultures to ponder.
And, as I gaze at your beauty,
There is a sadness
Knowing I shall never return.
Yet I take with me
A gift of rare beauty,
Priceless in value,
For I have safely tucked
A part of you in my mind so
In future months and years,
Through a fleeting memory,
I can return for a moment
To savor you once again.

On Natchez Trace

Pulsating jet engines
Begin to fade from memory
Jaws begin to unclench
Hasty pace, temporarily forgotten
As a bit of the past
Creeps back into conscious memory.
Winding from "Under the Hill"
To the Cumberland Plateau,
I traverse a this tiny sliver
Connecting the present
To the past.

If I had a son
Who had reached
That certain age,
We'd share that winding road
And I'd tell him
Some of the things he should know.

That a weed
May be a wildflower
Winding may be better
Than straight,
That nature heals all wounds
If given a chance.

I'd tell him about the mistakes
I have made
And the reasons why,
As best I know,
Hoping he will be wiser
As through life he'll go.

Point out God's gentle creations
Seen along the way,
That's not a bush
But rather a deer,
Maybe he would understand
It's true of humans too,
We often see what we look for
Even thought it may not
Be real.

Show him the shyest creatures
Will appear when left alone;
That man can exist with nature
For nature was not made
Just for man.

See how beautiful wisteria
So lovingly holds that tree,
Covering its branches with profusion
Of purple for all to see.
Perhaps one day
He'll understand
That if we love, we do not squeeze
And that beauty we often see
May not be what it seems
For the tree is slowly being
Squeezed to death by the vines.

It would be a perfect time
To stop at an Indian mound
And tell him about his heritage,
That he, like me,
Should be so proud.

If I had a son,
We'd walk together
Down that deep cut road
Where thousands have passed before;
It was they, not us
Who made this nation great.
Are we doing half as much?

Bill Melton

Fitzgerald, Georgia

He was walking by the roadside
Half-filled sack in his hand
Back bent and eyes averted
As he searched for aluminum cans.

It was a small town in South Georgia
And I was running far behind
So I stopped to ask directions
Sir, could you tell he how to find...

He didn't even bother to answer
Maybe, my question he did not hear
Instead he got into the seat beside me
Bag in one hand, in the other a beer.

I hid the surprise that I felt
As I did not intend to give him a ride
So I casually said, "This is a pretty town:
And he changed before my very eyes.

"It wasn't always called Fitzgerald
It's a colony town, you know
Used to be call Swan, Georgia"
And the history began to roll

He'd point to a house, mention a name
As a bit of trivia he would share
Pride was in his voice and eyes
Evidence of how much he cared.

Too soon we reached an intersection
Where he said, "Just let me off
Your call is down that road a ways"
As he departed with a limp and cough.

I know I'll never see him again
Nor do I even know his name
But my thoughts of Fitzgerald, Georgia
Because of him, will never be the same.

For this old gentleman reminded me
Of pages right out of the old South
Where friendliness, honesty and openness
Were more than just words from the mouth.


Woman Invents Dimple Machine

This is the dimple invention. When worn over the cheeks two knobs soon make a fine set of dimples.

DIMPLES are now made to order! These aids to beauty can be produced as the result of a new invention by Isabella Gilbert of Rochester, N. Y. The device consists of a face-fitting spring carrying two tiny knobs which press into the cheeks.

Big Sky Falling

I met Big Sky when I was 14. It was the only family vacation we ever took, the one to Glacier National Park to "see the bears." The road from Indiana to Montana seemed to last forever and transform along the way—a landscape distorted by waves of radiating heat, a kind of rippled reality through the dirty windows of our station wagon. The day before we arrived at the park, we slept beneath the stars at Bowdoin Campground, a family oasis on the outskirts of a Wildlife Refuge in Montana. I remember the tumbleweeds there, thinking how strange it was that they really existed, and that they did tumble. The earth at Bowdoin was mostly clay with smatterings of scrub brush, possessing contrasting greenery near the lake, a kind of Montana sanctuary breathing life into a great expanse of nothingness. When we rolled in, there he was, covered thickly in white clay, dancing around a yellow drum, kicking up dust and chanting, "Heya heya, heya heya, ..." His name was Big Sky, the only Indian I have ever met, the only first-hand understanding I have of Indians, and he still lives in my dusty memories today.

My sister and I were absolutely useless when it came to camping. We did not cook, and if we were asked to help we usually made a mess. To this day I cannot setup a tent, and thinking back, it's really just dumb luck that we managed to survive camping with my parents because my father looked as though he might snap at any moment—

the headlines would read, "They Deserved It!" We were miserable girls—we complained all the way to Montana, and when we got there, we only complained louder. It was inevitable, the moment when my father told us to go "check out the campground" which was an unmistakable replacement for the words I could see in his eyes, "If you don't get the hell out of here something very bad is going to happen." My sister, Trish, was 17, and I was thrilled when she suggested we go check out the Indian we saw when we arrived. I took every opportunity to follow her around.

We wandered around the campground until we saw the Indian. He was coming out of the bathrooms near a portion of the campground where the RVs were parked. The Indian had taken a shower and looked nothing like the primal clay figure we saw earlier. He was about sixteen with dark eyes, almost black, and his wet hair extended to the small of his back. He wore acid-washed jeans and a Whitesnake T-shirt with one sleeve rolled up to carry his cigarettes. He had an armband made of copper and Adidas high-tops with an eagle feather stenciled on the side. In short, he was the single most beautiful man I had ever seen. I was awestruck by his exotic nature. I felt a stirring inside me that seemed to radiate throughout my body and terminate in a tightening of my jaw—when my sister called to him and struck up a conversation, I just stood there, unable to speak, gawking at him like some kind of gangly-mute-zoo-visitor with coke-bottle glasses and weak knees. When he said his name was "Big Sky" I knew he was a real Indian; this handsome hunk of sixteen-year-old manliness was rugged and dangerous. In short, he was the single most important person in the world, despite the fact that I could not muster the courage to join the conversation or even make a grunting noise to signal my presence.

Trish was prone to fearlessness, and before I knew it she had agreed to go with Big Sky to Goose Island Pond, a place the local teens went to party and get away from their parents. Big Sky went to get his car and Trish prepped me for the night, "Just keep close to me, and don't drink anything you are offered. This is going to be fun, but don't tell mom and dad or I'm never taking you with me anywhere cool ever again." Then, there he was, Big Sky, driving an old Lincoln Town Car with a reddish-orange interior. The back was full of other dark-eyed teenaged boys, but the front seat was open for Trish and me to ride as guests of honor. This was a defining moment in the lives of my sister and me because for the first time in our lives, I made an effort to get the guy. I leaped into the car before she did, assuring that I would sit beside Big Sky, and Trish looked bewildered. She couldn't say anything and risk looking too eager, and she had never seen me step forward like that. I imagine she was feeling mixed emotions of pride and frustration but whatever she felt, she got in and closed the door.

Big Sky pressed an 8-Track tape into the dash and it started playing Indian Reservation by Paul Revere and the Raiders. As the music blared, "Cherokee people, Cherokee tribe. So proud to live, so proud to die..." we drove to the pond. The lyrics only made the whole moment more exciting; I even managed to open my mouth and sing along while I thrashed my head back and forth, slinging hair into Big Sky's face until I noticed he was holding up his arm to protect his eyes while he drove. In that moment the 8-Track paused to switch tracks, and Trish offered me a piece of gum. It was like a life preserver against the awkward moment when everyone realized I was spazzing-out over the song. I put the gum in my mouth and began to chew, and a few seconds later I felt Big Sky's fingers on my lips. My mouth opened obediently and he slid two fingers inside. My heart immediately lurched in my chest as Big Sky took my gum and placed it in his own mouth. He looked into my eyes to see my reaction—Big Sky was looking right at me, right through me into my soul! He had my gum in his mouth—my spit was in Big Sky's mouth—in that moment it occurred to me that this was so intimate, so sexual, it was like we were kissing, like the whole world had stopped while this gorgeous Indian and I locked eyes. That moment was so profound, so intense; it is forever frozen in my mind. A moment later Big Sky rolled down his window and spit out the gum, "Spearmint?" The spell was broken but the magic of that moment will probably remain the single most sexual experience of my life.

When we arrived at the pond there were groups of teenagers milling about. A few of them had beer, and some were smoking cigarettes. A boombox was blaring Rock You Like a Hurricane by the Scorpions. Big Sky lead Trish and me to a small fencerow where we could see everything. He lit up a cigarette and seemed to ignore us for a few minutes while his friends came around engaging in some elaborate handshake, asking him how much tourists had given him for dancing at the campground. *(Continued on page 47)*

Ken L. Jones

A Series Of Bridges

The sea lion's barks dissolved like hallucinations
In the hushed tones of the precipitation
Where frail birds seemed as other worldly visitors
In the drip, drip, drip of thunderstorms and ocean mists
As my submission to the white wine's simmering wings
Proved to be a tightrope walk to pleasant dreams
That though they are but dappled remembrances now
Are something that still gives pleasure when recalled somehow

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Kevin L. Kennel

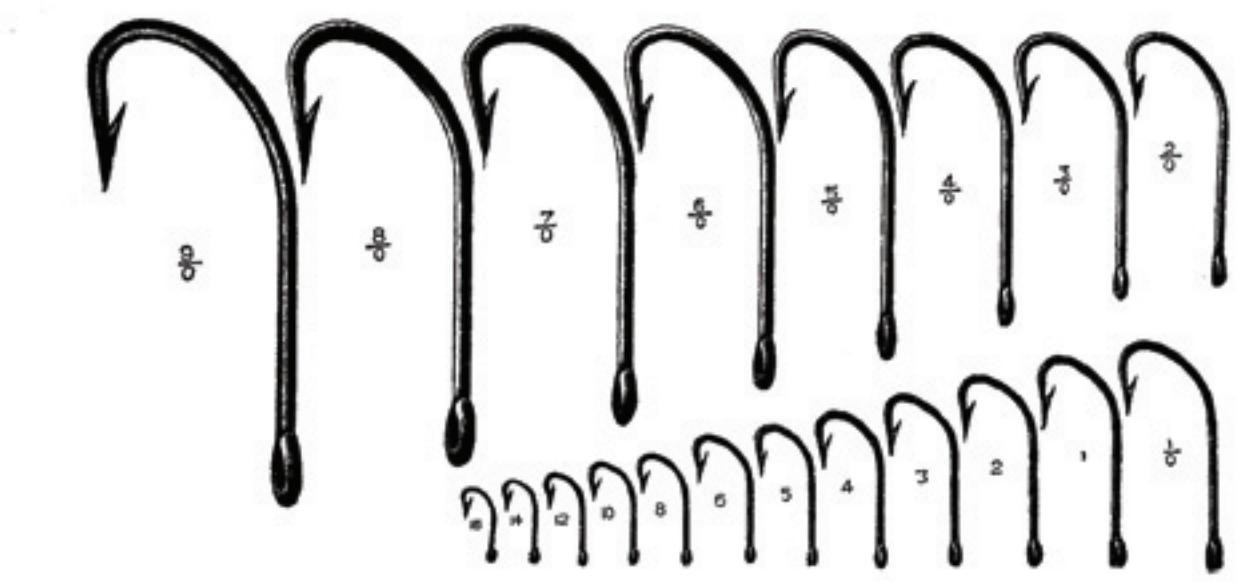
WALTER

The rattle of yellow leaves reminds me of clapping hands
As the wind reddens my ears with embarrassment over those hollow hours
Spent lost in a forest among low knife tipped branches.
I kneel in an empty November field and stare
Through the cold soil where I write my prayers hoping it will replace the echoes of old tapes.
My brain pulses with heat as I remove my coat so the memories don't melt
And everyday has become a fumble in the dark.
How did I know when you slept that night you would awaken on Heaven's dance floor?
You probably already heard Mildred's melody of love mixing with our laughter when I
fed you those canned oranges
As the juice dripped from your chin onto that clinical cot.
Your closed eyes and open mouth lead to a silent snore
Before the hope of one last Christmas vanished and I realized what antics of wounded meat we are.
I sigh and wonder if you'll save a spot for me when I let you go.
It's my last request since control is a difficult illusion to ignore and snow begins to fall.
Will it bury my prayers or are the flakes a mode of comfort?
An answer to guide me home before love's dim light vanishes from the temple you built.
But it's hard to feel the cold and carry on until my sham becomes truth in this blink of eternity.

Kevin L. Kennel

The Elusive Fisherman

Feel the hooks pierce my flesh as the gentle trickle of the river soothes the pain which I try to deny, but it burrows into my synapses and looms over the roadmap of my brain. A roadmap where the diagram looks like the inside of a tornado while the acrid scent of my capture breaks through the desperation of seeing you. Cigarettes and depression turn my flesh grey in a white ash light of treacherous roads that lead to the sound of your voice, but I know I won't be tossed back. It is upon this rickety bridge with its missing boards reminding me of days spent without you since they too are gaps seeking fulfillment that I took your picture and didn't realize it was used as bait until it was in my hands. You were so cute in your brown sweater and orange cap and huge smile that it became my favorite captured moment of you but you always stuck it in the glove compartment when we rode in my car. Ever since you vanished, it remains there and I doubt I will ever get used to seeing the visor empty. After I lifted the picture, the first hooks pierced my skin. Instead of screaming in pain, I looked at the androgynous figure dressed in the dark green trench coat with the rip in the left breast that will never be repaired. This figure stood among barren trees with wet black branches that had tips like knives ready to grab any wayfaring stranger and somehow I knew if I approached the figure willingly, my blood would decorate the forest. It wanted a fight to make the suffering sweeter. But what was there for me to embrace anymore? My reason to live disappeared with your last shovelful of dirt and I longed to rot with you deep in the earth rather than caught by whatever this person was. There are no more smiles from when we gazed into each other's eyes and you no longer gently run your index finger up the length of my face while I cup your chin in my firm but warm hand before I wake up and bitterly remember how empty the bed feels. Is the elusive fisherman a disguise for the cancer that took you? If so, in what form will it be when it breaks into my reality?



Jim Meirose

In the Ancient Cemetery

Shuffling down the sidewalk, as if intoxicated, between the library and the Meeting House, sun beating down, he reaches the rough concrete steps to the cemetery and stumbles into the cool shade among the stones. He walks the path between the ancient stones with really nowhere to go. The overgrown cemetery, with stones toppled here and there, and tall white obelisks catching the sun, suits the state he is in. Halfway through, weariness overtakes him and he sinks onto his knees atop a polished granite slab, deeply inscribed with the names of the dead. He curls into a fetal position and the sun pours down warming him. His eyes close as he grips his knees with both hands and squeezes.

The pen's in his hand, poised over the legal pad as the Manager speaks, fist lying atop his bare high-gloss desk. His great belly shakes as he speaks and images swirl in the air about him; stones, some tall, some toppled—baking in the sun for all eternity. "Today is the day you've got to tell them the score, Frank—today is the day you call them in and give them their packages—I hope you're ready for this."

Family plots ringed with wrought iron contain sorrowful angels with weathered faces. "Here," says the Manager, rising, "you can use my office. I need to go upstairs and see Peter for a meeting. Come, sit in my chair. Use the phone." *Shroud-draped granite urns atop pillars casting long shadows.*

The Manager leaves and Frank takes the tall leather seat behind the desk, picks up the phone and dials.
Pillars broken off before their time. "Marty, this is Frank. Come to Panko's office. Okay." He pulls himself tighter upon the slab, the heat in the dark granite rising through him.

Marty comes, sits down, and Frank tells him. "I can't believe it," stammors Marty, "—I—I just can't believe it—after all these years." *Obelisks. Grasping bare spring trees.* "I'm sorry Marty. If you want to talk to Panko I'm sure that he would—"
"To hell with you Frank."

Burning eyes look away across the rolling vista of stones angels and crosses. Three more are brought in and told. Burning eyes look through tears at the springtime sun and the mist rising from the graves.
"I won't take this lying down—"
Vultures circle high above.
"I hope this happens to you someday Frank—I really hope so! You son of a bitch!"

The stones are all about him in the hazy air of the office. All at once, as though it had never started, it is finished.

Ancient brown stones, like rotted teeth, lean in the oldest, darkest, place. He lay his cheek, finally, against the cool of the slab, his finger tracing the recessed lettering of the names of the dead. At last, the bullet in his heart does its work. He sighs deeply, red liquid pumps, spreading under him, running off the slab, and the faces of the angels about him all rush away.
Swan Song

Gary Beck

Harsh Reality

There is no forgiveness in nature,
except among higher orders,
which is closer to forgetting.

There is no kindness in nature,
except for higher orders,
even that is fleeting.

There is no compassion in nature,
except among the highest orders,
that is not enduring.

The struggle for survival is primal,
except among the highest orders,
defying nature's conventions.

Swan Song

I see too many faces
bitter and shriveled
by the summer sun,
smileless masks
of drab routine
battered by obligations
humming survival's song,
the grating sound
of a submerging city.

Gary Beck

Beaten Down

The myths of life do not reveal
how to endure the intolerable.
When the day's affront
multiplies insolence,
we fold our hands,
nod heads in acceptance
too beaten to resist,
flee to deathly dreams
seeking immigration
to a safer climate
from real or imagined offense,
fearful of more affliction.



Planned Obsolescence

American's peculiar ideas
have conditioned our belief
in strategic bombing,
so our leaders rant righteously
while carrying a smaller stick,
as we substitute technology
for the human element,
which allows us to accept
replacement by machines,
whose caretakers justify
remote destruction.

Soldier's Pay

It is easy to forget
casualties of war
sitting in comfort
far from danger zones.

Shortly after World War II
the nature of war changed
and was no longer considered
a national interest,
until it involved
our children and treasure.

Subsequently, the public
turned its attention elsewhere
and the land was divided
into those who cared
for the fate of the nation
and those out for themselves.

While our children bled and died
in a country far away
we squabbled over issues
of great consequence,
in unseemly spats
that convinced our loyal troops
serving on hostile shores
that they were of little value
and easily forgotten,
despite doing their duty.



Barbara Braverman

Drought

There is a drought
in the mountains and valleys
of my writing room
where Santa Ana winds whip
through the window
and leave dust balls
that cower in the corner.

My wastebasket is filled with
with crumbled paper
arid notes, unfinished
work, and false starts.

A prickly pear cactus
on the desk does not
need water, it stands proud
and tall, its yellow flowers
begin to pop.

But my poems need
nourishment to grow.
Prompts are not enough
to feed them.
Paper is blank,
my pen is dry.

Drought feeds fire.
A river of searing flames
and deep gray ash sweeps down
from the summit above,
threatens our neighborhood,
destroying all the poems
I've written, and those
that might have been.



Never Was, cont…

Oops! Table 4 wants a refill. Just stick a nipple on the Grey Goose and take it to her. Says she's seeing "Mr. It" on the rebound. He was in here with his wife about a month ago—slipped down to the "B" list and still sinking. Co-star is all he can muster these days. *Don't you just hate these two-picture stars that still strut and pose after their fifteen minutes of fame is a footnote?*

Sitting right there at Table 12, Al Pacino once asked me what kind of role I'd like to see him play. I told him Willy Wonka, and he stiffed me. Why are they all so needy for complements? That man knows he's irretrievably lost in mobster land.

Here, cover the bread basket just so. The slobs jerk the napkin and the rolls pop out in every direction. You can always tell the lower class by their snatch.

"Did you fold the napkin properly?" Boss Lady asked me one day, when some especially hot rolls took flight on Table 5. "You fold over the top—not under the rolls," she scolded me. I filled one right in front of her to show I knew my way around a bread basket. She smiled and sent me on my way, but I flipped that sucker over before I reached the table—Miss Crawford and Miss Turner again—and Lana ended up with a hot buttered martini on the house.

Oh, I don't do things like that very often, but you'll find out soon enough which ones are just asking for it. My-my, look who's coming through the door! I haven't seen him since his last lift. Looks very alert, don't you think? I wonder if they have to spend a lot of their time in dark rooms—all popeyed like that. I hear Joan Rivers wears a mask since she can't blink anymore. You know, it's a known fact that L.A. is the taxidermy capitol of the world—stretching, snipping, stitching 24-7. If you ask me, that Tori Spelling and Kathy Griffin are both on the critical list at Merle Norman.

Drop this off at Table 3 for me, would you? I'll plate your salads for you. Take an extra knife, too. Angelina needs one for each course. Says she's kosher. She's a phony. And straighten your tie before Boss Lady yanks you aside and wags her knuckles at you. You're going to love it here, girl.
Be right with you, ladies. The usual? You look absolutely stunning.

Big Sky Falling, cont…

I felt the urge to use the bathroom and the words fell clumsily out of my mouth, "Big Sky, where can I go pee?" I knew immediately that was wrong. I should have been more eloquent, not painted a picture of me squatting in the bathroom. I instantly wished I could take it back, but before I could he smiled and told me to follow the path to a Porta-potty.

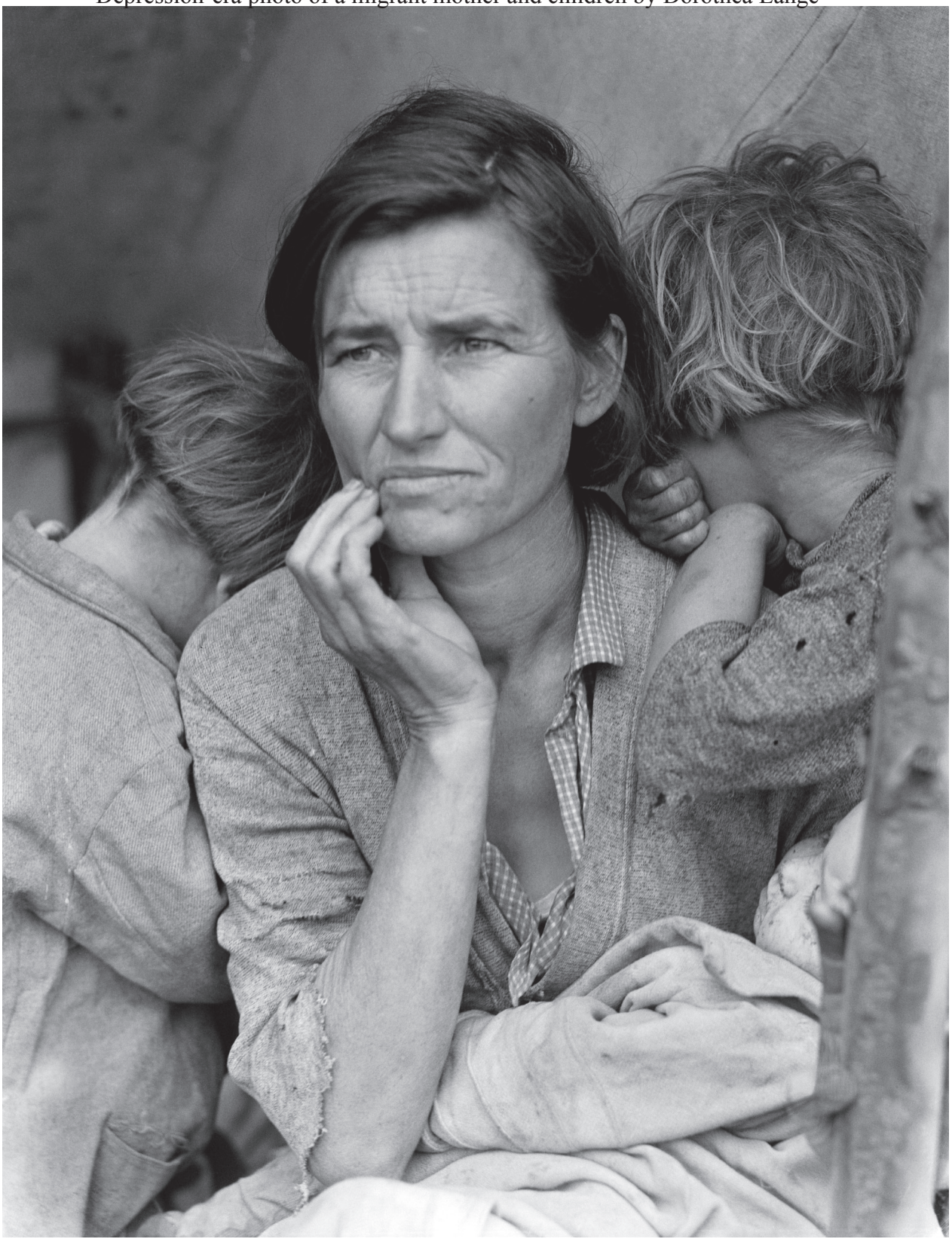
I wandered down the path that trailed between the ponds for almost 10 minutes until I saw a portable bathroom scrawled with graffiti. I went inside and relieved myself but also managed to get some kind of grease on my arm, which I tried to clean off but it only seemed to spread like leprosy all over me, even onto my face when I moved my hair out of my eyes. I could not return to Big Sky like that, and eventually I sacrificed my socks because there was nothing suitable to use for a washcloth. After some time I finally got clean and threw the socks into the bushes. I wandered back up the path.

I had been gone more than half an hour. When I came back Big Sky was sitting on a bench talking to Trish. Her hands were on his thighs and she was facing him, talking to Big Sky with her traitorous face only a few inches from his mouth. Big Sky wrapped his scrawny arms around Trish, cupping her ass. My heart sank. I couldn't even bring myself to go all the way up to them. I around, trying not to cry.

I noticed the way Big Sky wore Adidas; his shoes were made in China. This "Indian," and where was his horse? Why did "Big Sky" drive an old Lincoln? His armband was copper, not silver, and he smoked generic cigarettes because he was too poor to buy Marlboro. Big Sky was no Marlboro Man. I was looking with new eyes now; the rippled world was being ironed in my mind. In that moment, I could see that he was just a pimple-faced sixteen-year-old poser who steals gum from young girls. Today, when I see a Lincoln Town Car, I cannot help but imagine Big Sky living in a broken-down trailer somewhere in Montana, drinking a Big Gulp and buying Indian drum-replicas on Ebay.

-Staff

Depression-era photo of a migrant mother and children by Dorothea Lange



P. M. Merlot

White Doves Will Fly Above the Lie

"White doves will fly from her wedding cake." Those were words from a young mother's dream of her daughter's wedding day. My cousin's words. An idea I could not imagine, but I could imagine being there on her wedding day. We were close. Though my third cousin, she was more like a first. Joanna married and I am not there to see the white doves. None of us from New Jersey are there to see the flutter of white wings. We haven't seen Joanna since she was four.

My great-great grandfather could never have imagined that four generations later a descendent would marry a Palm Beach billionaire. A self-made man from New Jersey, and as her great grandfather he too left New Jersey. It would have been a different end if the secret were kept. They would be living middle class lives like the rest of us. They would all still be here. But, one truth, one lie, one secret can unwittingly change the future of generations.

In a way, I am relieved that I am not at the wedding. I am aware of class distinctions especially the habits of the nouveau riche. Women will be flanked in designer gowns, designer shoes, and even some will wear haute couture. They will wear it because they no longer have to look at price tags or purchase with coupons on sale days. Raised from the ranks of middle class ways, to new ways, to ways I cannot afford. My off the rack attire from Macy's, on a good sale day, would look like I was outfitted at Walmart.

Joanna should know about her great-great grandfather. She should know about his time spent in misery at a sanitarium in Germany. She should know about his diary, scribed in old German, and his vision of a better life. She should know he fled, the Industrial Revolution in Europe, to live here in a "little Germany." This was his haven to open his custom tailor shop and continue his handcraft. She should know how he taught his sons and passed his shop on to my Grandfather. She should know how those teachings got her great-grandfather a lead men's clothing designer's job with Hart, Schoffner, and Marx. She should know that was how her family started in Chicago.

Maybe, she does know this story. But, there is another story. One that was never to be told. Four generations ago, a truth became a lie. A truth became a secret. A secret that everyone from a small town knows except the one who it is about. Truths are withheld to protect. Some truths don't set you free. They damage, destroy, can't change the past, but they do change the future. Without asking, an entire town is expected remain hushed. Eventually, the secret is taken to the grave. That's the pact the four brothers made about Jack. But, someone else let it out. Jack disappeared, blending into the streets of Chicago, where only he knew his secret.

Eventually, Jack returned to his hometown for visits with his bride Marie. Brothers reunited, secret recoiled, quieted once again. Jack became Uncle Jack to my mother. He would return with his family in summers, sip Blackberry wine made by my grandfather, and was welcome by his other brothers. As his financial success was evident, made possible by his leaving, local family resentment grew. Jack's secret was unleashed by an in-law to the next generation. While my grandfather denied it, my mother's family confirmed its truth. Yet, it didn't matter to my mother. Just like her father, she never spoke of it.

Jack became Great Uncle Jack to me. He was a jolly man who loved his spirits. That he shared with his brothers, but his appearance set him apart from the rest. As short as they were tall, as small-boned was they were large, as round headed as theirs was elongated, Uncle Jack's DNA revealed itself to me. Lacking the carnal knowledge of an adult, I often wondered why he was so different. But, I never openly questioned it. He was my Uncle Jack and like my mother I loved him.

Many summers later, Uncle Jack brought his granddaughter Carol to meet her New Jersey family. She was seventeen and entrusted to drive his new Buick to New Jersey. Chicago life made Uncle Jack different. Carol, too. Bonds began for the next generation. From her uncles, she learned their favorite German song that united them, "Du, du liegst mir im Herzen." Carol and my mother would be as close as the two brothers. The two of them would sing the German song, passed on to them, whenever we were in the car. When I was old enough, I became part of that bond and song singing. "You, you are in my heart" sung in German.

Cousins, you never knew when you were young; always seem to appear in their older years. One day, Irv, an elder cousin, appeared at our front door with our family tree. That day, the secret came out for the third time, years after Jack died. Irv simply blurted his findings to us, "I found something out about Jack. Your great-grandfather adopted him. His father was Jacob Oberst." Just like that, I finally knew why he appeared so different. Ivv had a photo to prove it. Uncle Jack, named Jacob after his birth father, was plucked right out of him. There was no doubting or denying it.

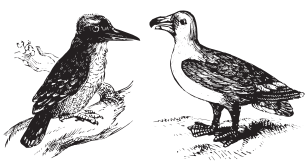
My mother seemed to forget the revelation made in her childhood. When it was disclosed she acted surprised. I wished Irv hadn't told me. We weren't joined by a paternal surname anymore. It felt different. Half cousins. Genetically, the bloodlines are remote. Given the 3.125 % of genetic overlap for second cousins, I figured our bloodlines at best were 0.5%. It wasn't the same feeling anymore. It was always about my great-grandfather, his sons, the legacy of the paternal side. I didn't know anything about my great-grandmother. No one ever spoke of her. Now, only joined through her, we had nothing of her to share with Carol.

Then, we told Carol. My mother is big on truth. I suppose she believed it wouldn't matter. For all appearances, it seemed not to matter to Carol. But, Carol's husband was quick in response, "All this and you are not even related." Unlike him, our response was not quick enough. We should have told Carol we were still bonded through my great grandmother. She gave birth to Jack, son to her, Uncle Jack to us, Grand Pa to Carol. There was a history we shared, just not the one I thought. Though, we remained silent. Not quick enough. Instead, we acquiesced to his conclusion. Conversation was redirected and we never spoke of it again. Years went by and we thought the secret was once more recoiled. Quieted again.

When my grandfather died, Carol drove six hours in her cream-colored convertible Cadillac. She drove herself with her two toddlers. By then, Joanna was four. A son, two. She attended her Uncle Bill's funeral and stayed days afterwards with us. The day she left, she sobbed. We didn't understand why the tears flowed. This was different. We didn't know this was her final goodbye. She knew. She would be the one to withhold the secret from her own children. With her, it would be safeguarded.

I imagine Joanna's wedding. White doves, released by the bride and groom, from their wedding cake, and hear the delight at the reception of those now in their lives. Symbolizing purity and devotion, all set their eyes on them. Wings spread, doves face each other, flutter upwards, and appear unified. It is a moment and they fly away. Only Carol knows they are not doves, but white homing pigeons. White doves will fly above the lie. She may come to understand that it is the illusion of the truth that is all that matters. She will accept the illusion, as something required. Perhaps, she will realize that acceptance of our family illusion, as something required, by all that came before her. Something required by her. Something required by all.

Perhaps, she will find her way back to us. Just as the homing pigeons return to where they belong, she will return to us. She, too, will fly above the lie. Above it all, she will hear the final stanza of that German song, sung by the brothers, sung by us, "Ja, ja, ja, ja, daß uns die Liebe vereint." Yes, yes, yes, yes, that we were united by love.



Polly Buckingham



Sadness, My Darling Waltz

The violin plays
sadness, my darling.
A man returns from a place
a bomb was dropped.
The world will never
again be what it once was.
I arrange the pieces
and retell them.
I feel the same as the violin
when it cries out.
That screeching edge of sadness,
did you know it was there?

The violin knows, and also knows
the ecstatic feedback of a microphone
or a voice dropped so low
it may never rise again.

Around me is jazz and cocktails,
the swish slur slur of ice and voices.
But I am alone in a room
curled on my side.
I am retelling the story of a man
back from war. A bomb
has blown the soft
blurs of sadness into bits,
and what is left,
my darling?

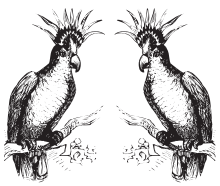
Waking in a Church in Cedar Key

first day of ground war, 1990

I'm standing on the outside
of an old white house. My eyes
look out the circles absent
of dust on the windows,
and my feet recover themselves

with soot. I walk in full
sunlight knowing the colors
of silence, the awkward, wooden

wings lifting and falling.



Polly Buckingham

The Forgotten Land

Here is where my heart
beat outside my body.
I could not stop
ten years of motion,
whole days
swallowed by speed,
hours lost
and a mangle of names,
Nick's, Munch's, Big Al, Jack's
Liquor Lounge large
hands dishwater tiki huts
still palms banana trees
night blooming star jasmine.

This night there is a smell
that burns on the inside of my face.
I hurt all over.
I could stay here
forever pressing myself
against this heat,
pushing the edges
of my quota of horror.

But I have lost the patience,
the energy,
the wild motion.
I will cast myself
back away from the fire,
my parts intact.
This day will never be again.



Beaten Blues

Don't call me,
I don't want to cry
no more. The fan's moaning
'cause the screws are loose,
and the floor's wet with rain.

Why'd you leave me, Baby?
The fan's loose, and I'm
on the floor watching
my big hands. I'm moaning,
Baby, rain is on my face.

Don't call, by morning
the fan will dry the floor,
and I can stop the rain
with my hands.

Glass Pipe

In a wide room of rain smells
a gardenia bush grows
between the floorboards.

2 AM: he stands, bends,
sticks his thumb between
the bricks in the road.

Open window, empty attic room
empty house big enough to lose
his way, empty city neighborhood,

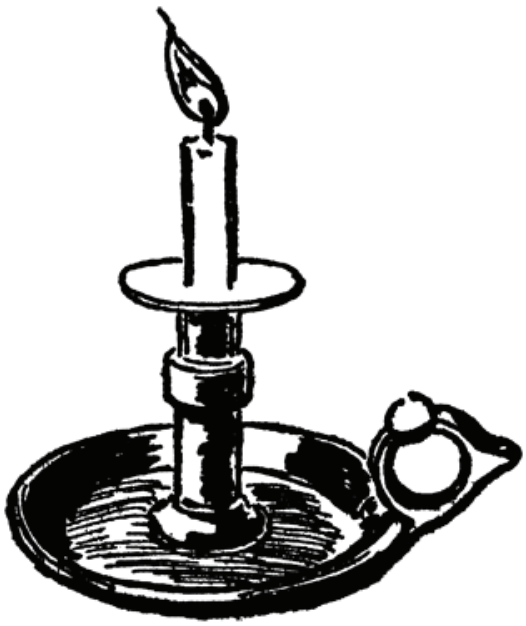
an occasional shadow black
in the lamplight, and rocks
white the street's moonlit

cracks.

Tom Pescatore

Untitled

Away from me you'll fly,
like this title,
like my life, into the void,
I have seen it happen,
watch it happen now
as snow sluggish, marches on
white city from white distances
in the west, I have carried a candle
for you, burning wax off my fingertips,
dry, I have seen how this ends,
and it's so silly, it's so inevitable,
away from me, I'll die.



23rd St. Works from Home

23rd street
fires, cars ablazin',
driver gettin' his laundry
and the story at the taco
truck is building with each
half known fact/each lie
says, "anybody in there?"
(the whole car is up in flames
now, smoke billowing 3 stories
and adjacent buildings fire
alarms squealing)
someone earlier had seen him
exit stage right, (said
might he maybe have struck
a pole--no damage to the hood tho)
so we repeat it (that the driver escaped)
figuring he probably did looking
to call for help (?)
and now everyone with
their phones out is free
to click and save misfortune--
least nobody died--fire trucks
ambulance hose water things
all out--a wonder of the first world,
23rd street 12pm Crystal city
lunch break tacos
stop.

Mark J. Mitchell

Dialogue

—There is something you've forgotten, my friend.
—I know. There was a book.
—Yes. Small. Gold-bound.
—That's the one. My father's first, one he found
on some shelf in a sad ruined house. Then
he left it to me. Odd story, the end
came on every page and each word's sound
weighed more than meaning. It dropped on soft ground
and sank. I dug. I searched. Now I pretend

I forgot its language. To admit
I've misplaced that book—
—Yes, I understand,
it would be like playing dice on a grave
or cards in church. Not the book itself, it's
the mistake. You don't fear your father's hand,
it's a talisman—
—Yes, I should have saved.

Beach Music

She heard a fish song rising out
of seaweed. She misunderstood.
She thought it called her by name.
So she dove in, head first, her good
dress ruined. The fish still proclaimed
its tail, ignored her splash, her shout.

(And the song, all waves and driftwood,
meant nothing human, just a game
of water, gills and silt, without
any sound, really--only plain
beach tones. And it wasn't about
her, no, it only told fish-hood)

A damp girl, plugged ears red with shame
sits sandy on a beach, wrung out.
The tide retreats, shells blink. She should
brush off her butt and leave without
a glance back at the waves. She would,
but, well, that fish did call her name.

Baseball Weather

The sky's scrubbed clean
as a five-sided dish.
Birds have returned from the south
and hold loud confabs in the trees.
Moist air is cool and soft
as newly oiled cowhide.
It's time for cleats to disturb
manicured red dirt.
It's time to hear the wounds
of wood on horsehide.
It's time for young men to emerge
from underground into glory.
It's time
to play ball.

Dreaming of Italian Food

you belch
low in your sleep,
curl like tortellini
sauced with purple wool,
dusted with
cream light
falling off
a romano moon.



Jordan Blum

You Were but a Ghost in My Arms—

—and a fragment in the ether
in the spring of Our Hope, after
confessions were made,
before they took you away.

When your father smashed frames
and your mother was disgraced
and your brothers just laughed
and your faith then relapsed.

Once you stormed out to
calm me, in the fray for our honesty,
as we rode to reach so far
and cast our wishes in the stars.

You were convinced that God was an astronaut,
entranced by the destruction of small ideas
and even smaller ideals—
—like the condemnation of Children who were
too righteous to conceal.

As the mist covered playgrounds held
church bells that no long rang, we
echoed the eras of our brothers
and lovers whose happiness
and hope forced them to hang.

And then you wandered away alone,
your fury a barrier from the rest,
pushing you further into isolation
as your belief in humanity digressed.

They found you sometime later,
lost within the woods,
frozen beneath the snow and the sill.
Your soul was too quick to abandon a body
that that had suddenly gone still.
In your left hand lay a bottle devoid of all its pills;
In your right, a handwritten confession and a plea for
your will:

The lives that we've chosen
are broken, not woven
with intricate delicacy.

And we'll be forever shunned
by the demoralized ones whose
judgments destroy us so callously.

Our union was a sin for which
we could never begin to
repent or replace, for we
loved each other soley, with
trust, so boldly, which
was a slap in His face.

After all, adultery, pedophilia,
divorce and abstain are truly the better acts
as long as everyone else approves and opposites
still attract.

Regret is merely the mind's punishment
for our heart's cowardice.
My heart is too weak to bear any more,
and I know only one way out of this.

Perhaps one day we'll be allowed to
live and love like we should, without
the scorn and ignorance of the resentful.
Until then, we must wait for the strength of
our spirit and the passage of time to transform us
back into angels.



John C. Kojak

40 Little Feets

Night fell upon Newtown on a chilly morning in December,
A day that everyone there will always remember.
Principals, teachers, mothers and wives,
Young boys and girls with big playground eyes.
Two to the chest, one to the head,
bang-bang-bang, they were all dead.
Nevermore the pitter-patter of 40 little feets,
Bouncing off the walls in the halls like joyful drum beats.
They sleep softly now under the dirt.
Their bodies buried, but not the hurt.
There were so many, but to name only a few:
Charlotte Bacon, the little ginger
In a pink dress and boots, what a hoot.
James Mattitoli, everyone called him J,
He loved hamburgers and bacon,
But his mom's French Toast the most.
Ana Marquez-Greene--with her big grin.
She is in heaven now,
But will surely smile when she sees her family again.
Caroline Previdi--silly Caroline,
And Madeleine Hsu, the shy girl who loved dogs,
I am sorry we couldn't protect you.
The teachers tried, and many died,
But the gunman refused to yield.
Poor kids, they should be playing outside,
Or coloring unicorns in their books,
Not lying in pools of blood at Sandy Hook.

La Petite Mort

La Petite Mort; Ah, Little Death.

Oh How I Yearn Your Blissful Heavens High,

In Lightnes, Grasping, Gasping, Out of Breath,

My Spirit Soaring Upward As I Die.

Au Revoir; Expired To Darkness Rest,

In Coffin Prostrate Spent: Hell Awaits.

If Life Be Choice, I Choose Sweet Death Be Best,

Less Angels, Locked Behind Pearly Gates.

Mon Amour; My Risen Lover Calls.

With Sword to Battle, Against Which I Adore,

A Caesar, Laying Siege Upon Sovereign Walls.

Lay Impaled Upon My Blade, Dying, Yet MORE.

Yes, Yes, A Thousand, No--Ten!

Glory, Glory, To Die Inside You Again!

Rejoyce!

James Augustine Aloysius Joyce
A perfect specimen to be sure
In whose works the whole world rejoiced
For with clever wit and powerful voice
He unveiled our illusions of grandeur

Not a noble, knight, or king
Just an Irish drunkard of sorts
Perhaps those are the same thing
Anyhow, a striking human being
Of that, no one can retort

More than a man, an epiphany
He scripted great tales of Ulysses
While wasting few words, if any
Few contemporaries, but admirers many
We still labor under his grave auspices

Finnegan's Way aside
There was not much he didn't say
With great skill and pride
It was a sad day when he died
In Dublin--everyday is Bloomsday

John C. Kojak

~ ~ ~Waves

Here you are again...my love
Laying astride my salty shores
Giggling, as a thousand
Of my tiny tongues lap at you toes
Laughing, as my foamy froth caresses your feet
Gasping, as I surge upward between your thighs
And swirl swiftly around your waist
You cry out as I lift your breast
Like boats upon my tide,
And spray a million little kisses across your lips
You are afloat--we are one
Rising and falling,
Rising and falling,
My waves crashing
Forceful~~~yet tender
Against the beaches of your surrender

Michael Kemp

Radio Free

Heather's skirt laid across her stomach, her panties balled up on the floor of the student radio station. Henry's jeans and boxers at his ankles stopped by his sneakers.
"What if someone comes in?" said Heather.
Henry kept at it with purpose, but without emotion, "Don't worry about it."
Heather's shallow breathes pushed out from pressure not pleasure. She thought about the sordid history of this couch. Over twenty years ago it had been hijacked from the library by DJs after dropping acid. A legendary amount of sex and other nefarious acts had been committed on it. Now they had joined radio station lore.
"Someone could come in if they have the code right?"
"I piled some promo crap in front of the door we'll have a warning if nothing else," said Henry.

It seemed as if Heather's plan of revenge sex was losing steam. Perhaps this wasn't the solution for dealing with Tommy groping a freshman. Henry would be quick to disagree. To Henry, the plan seemed sound. After all, he enjoyed sex almost as much as he hated Tommy.
"Are you crying?" Henry knew what he heard.
"No, I am OK."
Heather swallowed her sadness, "Is this song over?"
"I put on a compilation, seventy minutes worth."
Henry went deep into the dirty corridors of his mind. There he found his favorite porn star, Audrey Hollander and her fire-engine-red hair doing the dirtiest stuff ever. The porn loop in his brain brought it all to a boil.

Heather pulled up her panties behind Henry. He could feel her thinking. He continued filling out his log and lied about playing PSAs.
"You OK Heather?"
"Yeah, hey that was fun, but I am still with Tommy and I want to work it out. I am sorry if it's weird."
Weird? What's weird about awkward crying sex you insisted on, thought Henry. "Hey things happen. No harm no foul. Right?"
"No harm, none at all. Thank you for understanding and if you wouldn't tell anyone... Not that I am embarrassed to have sex with you, but you know, Tommy and all that."
Henry cued the next song, "of course."

The smell of sex lingered in the booth. No surprise there the booth, an unventilated hot box. At the last station meeting, a NO GAS policy had been floated, but no one could figure how to implement such a rule.

RING!
Henry faded out The Shins and faded in The Black Keys as he answered the phone, "Radio."
"Hey, how about some good music?"
"Doing it", Henry replied.
"No, some good shit how about Slipknot?"
"Who?'
"Slipknot, you never heard of Slipknot?"
"Are they the guys with fourteen members wearing masks?" Henry asked.
"Yeah!"
"Never heard of them," Henry said.
"What?"
"Just kidding. I will see what I can do."
"Thanks"
Henry dropped the phone on the cradle. No one has any taste he thought.
Henry scrolled through his cell phone's call history. He hadn't bothered to put Dean's number in but recognized the Los Angeles area code. Waiting for Dean to pick up Henry prepared to leave a message.
"Hello, what?" Dean sounded like he just woke up.
"Did I wake you?" Henry asked.

"No," sound faded out as Henry could hear the phone leaving Dean's ear, "Hey Henry what's up?"
"Just hoping you could hook me up."
"Looking for a little smoky smoke?"
There's the code that throws off law enforcement.
"Yup."
"I didn't' think you smoked?"
"Sure," Henry answered.
"OK, things are between drop offs, so all I got is an eighth. Is that OK? I mean killer bud and all."
"That'll be fine," Henry said.
"Never took you for a pothead. Guess you never know."
"Right."
"OK, I will be swinging by the station in twenty minutes."
"How did you know I am at the station?"
"I am listening to your show."
"Oh," Henry said.
"See you Henry."
"Yeah see you Dean."

Henry faded out and turned up the microphone, "It's ten- forty in the PM on this Friday and time for eyewitness weather. Hmm, looks dark. Now we have a special treat for a listener who wanted to hear some good music. Some real kick ass rock and roll. Some face melting heavy metal. This is for you caller."
Backstreet Boys faded in and Henry had to chuckle.

RING
Henry picked up the phone, "That was quick."
Homophobic profanities from a crank caller.
"Nice talk," Henry said, hanging up before the meathead could respond.

Built to Spill's Untrustable Part 2 faded in, all eight minutes and fifty-four seconds of it. Henry dialed Allison.
"Hey Henry!" Allison yelled before Henry even heard a ring on his end.
"Hey," Henry said.
"What you doing?"
"At the station."
"Huh? Oh yeah it's Friday. What you doing later?"
"Thought I would come by after," Henry checked the song countdown, "if that's cool. I am getting a package from Dean."
"Very nice. Treats, bring them over. Got to go Henry. See you soonish buddy."
"Later!"

Buddy, pals, friends with benefits. Get Allison high and she would do all kinds of things. Not Audrey Hollander things, but things none the less. If nothing it should be the least awkward sex of the night.

Henry's phone vibrated with a text, "BE THERE 20!" Henry waited for pot he had no intention of smoking. Allison didn't even question the fact he didn't smoke it. She would just fire up her Hello Kitty bowl and puff away. She would start coughing and giggling. Then Henry would start rubbing her leg or running his hands through her hair. She would make faces and wrestle around. Same beginning and middle and it always ended with sex. Henry didn't dare to make a move on Allison without weed. If she wasn't high it might mean something else. Dating? Maybe? Henry couldn't be bothered with a girlfriend. Girlfriends involved work. You had to do things with them.

Modest Mouse blasted in the booth as Dean pounded outside the station door. He fumbled for his cell phone to call Henry.
"Hey Gaywod!" Dean jumped when he heard the voice. He turned and a fist filled his vision. His eye socket erupted in pain. Things went gray as he fell against the door. His legs gave way ever so slowly. Still stunned, another fist hit him where the jaw connects to the skull. He slumped to the floor. He made out three figures as he put his hands over his head only to be kicked in the ribs.

Henry perused the College Music Journal charts and upcoming releases. He wrote a note to himself regarding which label reps could put him on which guest list.

Meanwhile Dean was already on the way to the hospital with a broken orbital bone and a busted jaw. His ribs had been bruised. The weed as still stashed in one of the many pockets in Dean's cargo pants.

Two chain smoking theater students snickered as the meatheads had been handcuffed and forced into a cop car, crying with snot running down their rugby shirts in the Quad. As the cops bellowed for all in earshot regarding felony assault, attempted murder and possibly a hate crime if Dean was indeed gay.

Henry wondered if he could convince Allison to dye her hair fire-engine-red.

Nikki Carr

Dreams Past the Length of Her Two Leather Shoes

Vintage pitch fork photographs,
crying for relief as she baled hay,
always conjured up pale childhood memories.

The grange, the fetus of her
mother's womb carried contrived comfort
to the drudgery and hardships of farm life.

Their farm gave her the gift of
umbra lungs, filled with the scent of dung,

and ruby gore freely flowing from her hands.

Her sole refuge was grade school,
as the land was a snake, which swallowed
her whole, then spat her out; only to tend it.



Alone, she walked home in silence,
touching the earth's crust beneath her feet
with dreams past the length of her two leather shoes.

She dreamt of cures for lost minds
and solace where she could just be her,
and settle on dreams beyond the valley floor.

She hopes to tend a tract of land
that is her own and bring her comfort
with dreams past the length of her two leather shoes.

Lost in Quicksand

You're lost; who you are?
All I have are memories
of laughter,
song and stories shared
while baking cookies with Mom.

Playing dress up, games,
prayer, all the things we found
comforting
from the palms of our
hands to the souls of our feet.

You live in a time
of hopscotch, twister; your smile
never lost
nor your fuchsia blouse
or perfected manicure.

Your house shuttered and
framed with palms, boxwoods,
privets,
overgrown;
your tired soul worn
from blood cleansing thrice
weekly.

Where did you go? Laos?
Street people perform each night
on the steps
of your home bringing
crowds to place coins in tin pans.

You chose the northern
star to take up safe haven;
start anew
with strangers. Where have
you gone? Come back, we miss
you.

Nikki Carr

BFF Jenny

I. Public Persona

She had the perfect blend of sable,
soft as silk, hair floating behind big,
billowing clouds at sunset.
Her skin, free of wrinkles caused by age
and worry. Her body, taut without a bump
or bulge, which only hope and good genes forget.

She energized a room with her grace;
a single pause and breath. Green pupils
sparked a flame in the bellies
of her guests as she entered the room.
No words spoken which we knew; only sounds like
streaking light rays passing through our flesh and
bone.

Perfect, like the hands on a Barbie,
we're enthralled by her beauty and grace,
wondering how she traveled
far and wide and became one with the
landscape like the native flower. No one could
acclimate as she; we had not that power.

She shot piercing looks through the room while
dressed in a shiny, black coat as dark
as coal. No English did she
speak, but yet her communiqué was clear,
as we swooned at her feet, with hopes to receive
her soft caress and feel the breadth of her soul.

Eliminating bodily waste,
napping and feeding daily, absent
a single thought of hauling
greenbacks to the home; that was her job.
She earned her keep without engaging
in the toil and trouble of a 9 to 5.

She gave her caretakers unyielding
love, attention, playful tease and fob.
Her boundless love of ballet
prompted her to prance about her room
which spread contagious joy that left us all in
awe, as we sized her up and found her flawless.

II. Private Solitude

At home, alone in her solitude,
she quietly whispers her story
of drift and isolation.
Moving from house to home resulting
in rotating, enabling , faceless souls, for
whom she really never knows. Yet, she sleeps all

day to quiet her restless mind in
the outer twilight. Unable to
find inner peace, she walks through
the house securing perimeters
visiting each window, each door, until the
stroke of midnight. Sometimes her mind is scram-
bled

like a freshly cracked egg, whipped until
foam emerges and sadness peaks with
such great might. The sun rises;
she does the same as the day before
until her limbs grow weak and tire. She is
weary of the routine of catering to

her caretaker's whims. So she seeks the
open plain and finds yet another
who calls for help and hire.
No shortage to swap services for
room and board for which she is akin. Then, she
meets and greets and starts the whole process again.

Wherever she lands, wherever she
roams, my best feline friend (BFF) Jenny can
always find a home. She gives
me such comfort when I need it most.
She kept all my secrets and held them quite near;
My BFF Jenny lived life with no fear.

Nikki Carr

Spin Cycle

I grow weary of your soiled
jeans, shirts and shoes piled
high to the tops of my lid,
trying to maintain
an even temperature, though
my quiet calm keeps me on the job,
retrieving lost socks,
stones, tissues and coins;
those discarded things
left naturally in pockets,
making it next to impossible
to rest busy hands
soaked in sweat and crust
from recurring baths
of chemicals in soapy water
needed to kill germs,
wash away the dust
and evidence of the day,
only to find once
malleable, youthful
hands which washed
many a load and
managed your daily
discards, then with the
passage of time, my
tub eroded, my
cycle stopped,
my good days are past;
my best ones are yet to come.



GF Boyer

What You've Missed So Far

-- for my father

Peonies. Full moon.
Starry night in spring.

A splash of shadow
blackening the grass.

Summer heat.
Cicadas in the trees.

Fireflies rising from the lawn
like wandering stars.

The dot-dot-dash of a thunderstorm
pocking the surface of a stream.

Me, finally slowing down
to remember your waning breath,

the silence when it stopped—

Trimming the Wandering Jew

Extravagant purple and green
overspill the clay pot and table,

threaten to engulf us with wanderlust.
Late afternoon sunlight ignites leaves

to luminous violet. I come, wielding scissors,
for the great diminishing.

(Blessed be growth, within limits.)
The little pains with each amputation,

sap on the scissors, agony
of ragged edge, not-so-clean cut.

Roots yield when I poke too hard
against matted and ingrown stalks.

Cuttings go into a jelly jar—
the start of another twelve tribes.

Wandering here in this little desert,
let us gather our bread, and multiply.

GF Boyer

The Quick Brown Fox

He jumps over a lazy dog—that's
what starts the whole thing off. Now
the dog's in mad pursuit, not so lazy
anymore. The fox had a good head start.
He's just teasing that old dog.
We watch from our front porch,
laughing as we drink our mint juleps.
"Pack my box with five dozen liquor jugs,"
yells dad. "Sure, Dad," we say, but no one
gets up. Dad drinks too much liquor
anyway. We've felt his drunken rage
and the stinging leather of his belt.
Best not to let Dad hear us, we all know.
Wafting zephyrs quickly vexed Jumbo.

Breasts

Heavy handbags I'd rather not carry,
beckoning men I don't want to attract,
intended for babies I'll never have.

Back pain inflicters, cancer hostesses—
I never liked them, and now even less.
Heavy handbags I'd rather not carry,

heading south, resembling my mother's.
They bounce when I run (it hurts, goddammit).
Intended for babies I'll never have,

they itch, they ache, they're always in the way.
What woman has a bra that won't torture?
Heavy handbags I'd rather not carry,

they itch, they ache, they're always in the way.
Arriving first like the prow of a ship,
and intended for babies I'll never have.

Who would design such ridiculous cargo
just in case, just in case, just in case, just in case?
Heavy handbags I'd rather not carry,
intended for babies I'll never have.

Rhonda Parrish

Two Wrongs

Lives lost,
shattered,
like the surface of a placid pond
after being struck by a stone.
The tranquil surface is disrupted
by ripples of pain
that go out
and out
and out.
Alas, serenity cannot be reclaimed
by throwing another stone
but only by waiting
for time to perform its magic
and smooth the surface
once more.

Golden Hour

Light turns to honey,
and molten halos surround
each blade of grass,
and leaf on the tree.
Gnats transform
to flitting fairies
and croaking frogs
to a choir.





Nicholas Thacker

Sunday

It was complete silence.
As those who uphold a culture
formed on the basis of traditional values
filed into coffee shops one by one.
This would be the only day so many have for themselves,
but how many have come here in discontent?
For they know tomorrow
is the beginning that their lives will end once again.
They have went to church,
to feel the presence of illusionary bliss.
And now, as they sit within their solitude
the fear of others confines them to themselves.
But, if they have come with another
they remain hidden behind their barricades
as the fear of others continues to build,
our eyes will never connect,
for we are sitting within our confines.
We can only hear from a distance
those who speak of business,
those who speak of god,
and those who spew the political trickery
of an ideology that upholds an oppressive nature.
They all sit with words that flow like venom to who ever may listen,
as their anger flows through rivers of life's discontent,
the illusion of what has led them to their current state of being they cannot grasp.
It is almost as though on the last day,
the only day where most cannot worry,
their angry continues to flow like the coffee that has turned cold,
to now be bitterly consumed by the desperate who search
for a way out of their sorrow.
they are sitting alone although they are with others
on their only day in solitude.







The Real Cost of Gas Depends on How You Drive

Most American drivers are feeling the pinch of higher gas prices at the pump. The US Energy Administration reports the average price of regular unleaded gas in May, 2014, to be $3.76 per gallon, more than twice the cost of gas when Obama was first sworn into office. During this same period of time, the Environmental Protection Agency reports that the overall average efficiency for cars has not increased much, a mere 15% in some classes of vehicles, and less in others. Even though many consumers seem to be more interested in living green, reducing emissions, and conserving resources, new information is coming to light to make consumers aware that it takes more than buying green to be green. For example, many of the new hybrid cars, such as the Honda Prius and others, can actually pollute more than standard cars (Scientific American, Jan. 2014). Consumers are left wondering how to reconcile these issues. Hypermilers have the answer. Hypermilers are conscious drivers who choose to change their driving habits to get the most out of a gallon of gas. Many hypermilers get more miles per gallon, while driving cars made in the 1990's, than yuppies driving today's best hybrids (Hypermiling.com). What drivers are beginning to realize is that the cost of gas, both in money and environmental damage, depends more on how you drive than what you drive.

The revelation, "How You Drive Matters," did not escape UPS, one of the world's largest delivery companies. UPS learned that avoiding left hand turns can save their company millions of gallons of gas per year, reduce carbon emissions, and save nearly $80,000,000 in fuel costs alone (UPS.com). These savings were not from buying new equipment; they were gained simply by using existing trucks more efficiently. Hypermilers have employed that mentality all along. It's about getting the most from what you already have and being a responsible consumer. If the policies of UPS are revolutionary, then hypermilers are revolutionary-on-steroids. They employ all the tricks at their disposal, and many report astounding results.

Hypermilers know their cars, and they use that knowledge to their advantage. The fuel efficiency of any car is highly dependent on what gear the car is in and how fast the car is travelling. Every car has a sweet-spot, usually around 45MPH. According to many hypermilers, choosing to travel roads that are slower instead of jumping on highways can increase fuel efficiency as much as 30% (Hypermilers.com). This is in keeping with what the US Department of Energy has stated all along, "aggressive driving can lower gas mileage by 33%" (fueleconomy.gov), and those figures only include how fast drivers accelerate and stop while driving. Add to that some of the more extreme measures hypermilers employ and fuel conservation skyrockets, often doubling the MPG drivers enjoy from their vehicles.

Altering how you drive is the most important aspect of fuel economy. According to TomTom.com, a GPS mapping organization which cooperates with hypermilers through software and shared forums, each 5 MPH over 50 costs the average consumer about $.26 per gallon. These revelations have prompted many hypermilers to buy software that works with their smartphone and car computers. TomTom reports that drivers who use this type of software save another 10% ($.37 today) off every gallon of gas, just by being informed and making small changes. By employing this knowledge, hypermilers can change their habits to maximize fuel efficiency. By coasting down hills, turning cars off when idling, and accelerating optimally, drivers can often save as much as half a gallon of gas every hour they drive.

Some hypermilers don't stop at modifying their behavior. Many include vehicle modifications like engine tweaks and external wind panels under their cars. According to many reports on websites like Cleantechnia.com, these modifications squeeze another 10% to 15% from every gallon of gas. Soon, the efficiency hypermilers enjoy surpasses the MPG today's hybrid cars claim, without polluting the environment by manufacturing another vehicle.

Other techniques hypermilers employ include lifestyle changes. Riding bikes when possible, parking in the shade, removing excess weight and cargo, planning trips to coincide with wind directions, drafting behind semi-trucks, combining errands, keeping windows up to reduce drag, employing overdrive, parking in through-spaces, using a block heater and even choosing the Easypay option for tolls all play into efficiency (over a hundred similar tips can be found at EcoModder.com). Even if you are not interested in becoming an extreme hypermiler, some small changes can cut your gas costs by as much as 30%. In an era when people wait in line to save a few cents per gallon, it makes sense to stretch your efficiency and save money simply by remembering that the real cost of gas depends on how you drive.

-Staff

Hypermiler Caption Contest

Send your best caption to editor@DualCoastMagazine.com for a chance to win a Prolific Press gift certificate good for any single title in the bookstore. http://ProlificPress.com/bookstore



Sailing on Rosamond Dry Lake in the "Desert Queen" (1905)
Photograph by: Pierce, C.C. (Charles C.), 1861-1946

Catfish McDaris

River of Whiskey

A curse hung in my ear, I got
the bottle, poured myself a
drink, lit a cigarette

It didn't make sense, some
lady wanted to play, to know
something about my business

Whiskey calmed my nerves, I
was half asleep, I dreamed about
giant catfish in the river

My mother told me some were
so big, alligators left them alone,
I caught one, its head was the
size of a man's torso, I shouted

Mother must not have heard, the
catfish kept trying to dive, I finally
let it go, I was crying

I picked up the receiver, "Hello"
the accent wasn't French exactly,
"I am calling you about a problem"

Enunciating each syllable,
"Who in the hell is this?"

Second Hand

Hiking, wearing my brother's
hand me downs, in the
Guadalupe Mountains
along the Pecos River, thinking
of the one that got away

Dreaming of cigarette
factory workers on a
street in Seville in
Bizet's Carmen

Smokers outside odalisques
polluting paranoia, a coyote
howl resembling human
laughter echoing off stone
wakes me abruptly.

There's No Such Thing as Friendly Fire

He was suppose to play
sax in the band, nothing
fortified him to be an
infantry platoon leader

Nothing prepared him for
the freezing temperatures
of a Korean winter

He was no hero, no braver
than any other soldier, they
were all afraid, just following
orders from Washington

They marched cautiously
into a quiet village, as night
fell like a guillotine

The only building left standing
was a church, they removed
their helmets and prayed for peace

A whistling sound could be
heard in the silent air, it was
the last they would hear

The high explosive shell killed
them all, it came from an American
ship anchored in a nearby harbor

The medics wrapped what was
left of their bodies and collected
their dog tags for the ones they'd
left back in their own world.



Catfish McDaris

Santa Claus is Dead

The ghosts flew down
from the clouds above
the quiet Rust Belt City

Dust devils dance with
scurrying rats behind
the rusty locked doors

Alarm clocks of progress
ring but no one hears in the
boarded up neighborhoods

Abandoned naked factories
cry like hungry orphans as the
lust of the rich prevails again

While the poor and the children
whisper prayers that won't fill
their stomachs and the jobs
float away on pitiless winds.

Sea of Love

She's got the jiggle
in her dynamo wiggle

An eight ball monkey
on her back trying
to eat up her mind

While the guitars
wept Howling Wolf,
Leadbelly and the
Mississippi blues

We sipped ice
cold beer from
Gauguin's ear

And watched rain fall
from a zillion stars
dreaming of above &
trapped in a sea of love.

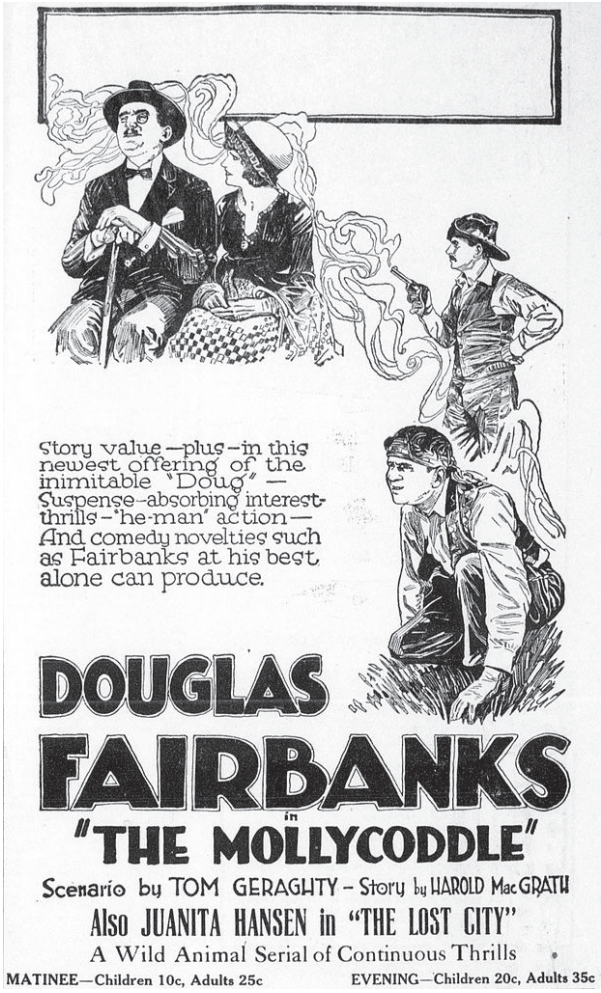
Michael Blake

Those Insidious Details

Here again they bit at him, annoyed,
The trivialities working their way in,
Distracting, taking any focus.
Futile attempts at casual dismissal
For he is unsettled by the wave after wave,
The daily detail that threatens to submerge
The artist adrift in the inconsequential
The man who can't laugh it off in this flood.
Affected again, stewing in his juices,
Failing to get the most from his time.
Did the anguish help mold him as a man?
Did it sharpen the artist, in the end?
Or was it just brutally indifferent Time
Effectively wounding him day by day?

Wide-Eyed

That fastened, unwavering stare,
Innocence fully absorbed
In the moment,
Seemingly stunned,
Frozen in captivation.
What answers (adult acceptable)
To tiny fingered questions?
Making it succinct and satisfying
So as on to the next thing
Little curious machine
With the squealing exclamations
The excited jerking here and there.
Exuberant wonder recharges
Older batteries around it,
The babe commands center stage.



Michael Blake

Right There

Ah, to be at that point where I don't care –
So seldom does it come –
Where I can laugh at even those close,
Saying that the movie doesn't end like that,
With smiles and kisses for everyone,
That after my obligatory shake of the dice
I'm still out of corporate luck and out on my ass,
And still waving my godless flag
At the so-called spine of the town
The stylishly clad movers and shakers
With their cork pulling toasts to lucrative deals.
Take your suits and quotes for the press
For I've got you all down already,
Alas, minor characters in the epic
(Politics always secondary to the real story),
I blow my eighty-proof vision at you
In all my glory in medicated America,
I see all the pills washed down,
The brief fantasies smoked,
The injections into ruined lives,
The drink-blown faces atop lonely barstools,
And I've had my eye on that man behind the curtain,
Feeling it my civic duty to expose the wizard
Be he throwing switches in Washington
Or out on the road, dazzling with those pearly whites.
So many "stars" on tour these days
Allowing the public a taste of celebrity,
A buying, starving public - statistics and shaken hands -
Yes, God Bless, and send the check to ....

Michael Blake

Seeing My Lady Dance with Her Disturbances

Seeing her troubled face, the thoughts wreaking havoc
With the moment, her spirit twisting here and there,
Fingers with a death hold on the cigarette,
Muttering at the indifferent floor, the walls,
A song comes to mind with the picture:
Acute Schizophrenia Paranoia Blues
(Wouldn't a drunken Davies laugh be helpful here?).
Throwing it all three sheets to the wind,
Indeed, fighting off those walls closing in,
Making bold to venture out, grab the day by the throat,
Give it a good shake, brain it with the bottle,
Sister, who are you at the moment?
Can we inject some old rock and roll
Into that worn out middle-aged attitude?
Can we perhaps bring out at least a smile?
Ah, the days are passing, and you dressed in frustration,
Shaking your drug-filled head at the unanswered,
A silent scream for your lonely predicament.
Would a quick peck on the cheek be enough
To bring you to a brighter surface, shake you
From depression's hold, that dulled trudge to the grave?



Lela Marie De La Garza

Anger

"You did what!?" Grace was incredulous—so much so that she couldn't take in what Gregory had just told her. He shrugged his shoulders, spread his hands. His mouth moved, but no words came out. "How could you lose all our money playing poker? You don't even gamble!"

"I don't. I didn't. I mean—I played with Joe and some of his friends one night for fun. I won a little bit. Then Joe's friends invited me into a bigger game, and I won a little more. I kept playing, and I kept winning, and then I lost."

"You lost all our money?"

"Not then. I decided to keep playing till I won it all back, then stop. Only I never did. I won, but never enough. I know I should have quit. But I kept thinking I had to break even if I played long enough."

You fool! Grace thought. *You utter fool!* Her steely eyes never left Greg's face as he ploughed desperately on. "The more I lost the more I had to make back. I cashed in the bonds. And our retirement CD. I maxed out the credit cards. Now there's nothing left."

"How much do you owe?" Grace spoke through lips so stiff they would barely move.

"Nothing. I paid it all off."

"With everything we had."

"I'm sorry…I wish I could tell you…"

But Grace wasn't listening. An overwhelming anger had closed her ears to anything he said or might ever say again. She'd been angry at Gregory before. The night he'd broken their engagement, two days before the wedding, she'd been angry. Enough to throw his ring at him, then a vase, then the table the vase sat on…

On their twenty-fifth anniversary (he'd changed his mind, and they'd married after all) Gregory had asked her for a divorce. She'd dumped a glass of champagne down the front of his tuxedo and followed it with a full bottle. Grace remembered how she'd felt then. Of course he changed his mind again, and they had stayed together.

Oh yes—she'd been angry at her husband before—but never like this. She had no desire to yell or throw things. A shell of ice had closed itself around her, propelling her to quick, efficient movements: Calling her niece, arranging to spend the night, packing two suitcases, walking out of the house. She was vaguely aware of Gregory imploring her to stay, making promises, at some point actually crying. But he was no longer part of her life.

Grace decided to take a bus instead of a taxi. Money would be difficult for awhile until she figured out exactly where she was. Besides the bags didn't seem heavy at all. Anger had given her strength she didn't know she possessed. Her mind worked quickly, ticking off what could be salvaged. She had a savings account in her name only. Gregory wouldn't have been able to touch that. There was the property in Alabama, also in her name. She could sell that. Perhaps even live there.

Grace saw a bus stopping, climbed aboard and sat down, a slender, graying woman who might have been attractive if her face had not been so carefully expressionless. Now a cold smile broke that lack of expression. Why, she wondered, was anger so maligned? There were even classes in managing it. Why she had never felt

better since anger swooped down to manage her. How quickly its healing, cleansing touch had liberated her from that miserable mess of a marriage and that miserable excuse for a man.
Exalted and uplifted, she arrived at her niece's front door.

Heather greeted Grace warmly. She had questions, but the look on her aunt's face told her now was not the time to ask them. She led the way to Angela's room. "Please stay as long as you like," she urged. "Angela comes home once in a blue moon—and she never says overnight."

"Thank you, dear," Grace replied. "But I want to find a place of my own as soon as possible." Heather wondered about Gregory but didn't ask. Her questions would be answered in time—and she didn't think the answers would be pleasant. Right now she sensed that her aunt would like nothing better than to be left alone, so she went out, closing the door noiselessly behind her.

Grace did, indeed, want to be alone. She spent a few moments just relishing her freedom. If only she'd known long ago how sweet it would be. What she'd felt in years past had been only rage, burning hotly and dying quickly. This new, wonderful anger did not burn but cooled and soothed. It would strengthen and sustain her through any problems that might lie ahead. It wrapped firm, gentle arms around her, and she leaned on them…

It occurred to Grace that she might start looking for somewhere to live right now. There were better sources than the telephone book, but it would do to begin with. She opened the bedside table drawer.

Instead of a phone book Grace found a picture album. She began idly leafing through it. These pictures were not new to her, as she had copies of most of them in her own album at home. Not home, she reminded herself. *That place where I used to live.*

There was a shot of Heather and Angelo, newly married, at their wedding reception. One of Angela's first birthday party…another of Angela at the zoo. A family picture, herself and Gregory included, at a picnic on the beach. She turned a few pages, going back further in the photo history. Here were studio portraits of her mother and father. A snapshot of Ryan, her oldest brother, on his motorcycle. A picture of all four of them standing in front of the new house…how exciting that had been… Her grandfather, young and strong. She remembered him only as an old man in a wheelchair. On the opposite page was a picture of her grandmother, Geraldine. Grace had often been told she resembled her grandmother, and she was flattered to think so. Looking closely at the picture she could see it—level brows, firm lips, firmer chin…

Geraldine and her husband had once been, if not rich, quite well off. Then, just before the Great Depression, her grandfather had made bad speculations in the stock market and lost all their money. He had a stroke then, which put him in a wheelchair for the rest of his life. Grandmother Geraldine, who had never worked a single day outside the home, suddenly became the sole support of an invalid husband and four children under twelve. She took in sewing as long as there was anything to sew, and washing as long as there was anything to wash. She picked apples and sold them, and when no one wanted apples she baked pies and fed her children.

Grace suddenly wanted to turn the page, but Grandmother's eyes held her. Surely she only imagined the disapproval in them. *You had children. I don't have children. It's different!*
"Is it? You took a vow, for better or worse."

But I've never had the better, only the worse! She managed to turn the page. There was another picture of Grandmother, standing beside her wheelchair-bound husband.

"Duty is an old-fashioned word. But when anger drops you, it may be all you have left."

NO! That can't happen. I won't let it happen. But she felt the cooling, cleansing anger draining away.

She clutched it tightly, trying to shore it up with memories of Gregory's past stupidities. The time he'd gotten them lost in the New Mexico desert and driven three hundred miles out of the way because he was too stubborn to believe the map or to ask directions. The time he'd gotten drunk at the McManus's party and thrown up on their expensive carpet, and Mrs. McManus had assured her, with furious eyes and through clenched teeth, that it was nothing really. Grace certainly needn't have it cleaned (she had, of course, and the stain hadn't really come out, and they'd never been invited to the McManus house again). The time he'd driven carelessly through a red light and totaled the new car, and then she'd found out he hadn't changed the insurance over. The time...

It was no use. The album dropped from Grace's nerveless fingers. She fell back on the bed, her anger-fed strength gone. For a long while she just lay there, realizing her new-found freedom had never been anything but an illusion. Then another feeling, drab and bitter, stiffened her spine and lifted her up. She put the picture album back in the drawer and closed it gently. *Grandmother, I don't think I like this much—but I guess I'm you after all...*

~~~OOO~~~

Heather said good by to her aunt, knowing her questions would never be answered, but that they weren't important now. Grace carried her suitcases--much heavier this time—to the nearest bus stop and waited for the bus which would take her...home. Yes, home—to the life she'd almost escaped and the husband she'd bound herself to. *Anger isn't meant to last,* she reflected. *Duty is made of steel.*
Grace lifted her chin to the world and smiled at it. In that moment she was Geraldine's twin.

Lela Marie De La Garza

Dream Weaver

"I don't think we need the dream sequence," Colton said.

"But that's the high point of the picture."

"Why? Huxley's wife is dead, and he knows it. What does a dream have to do with it?"

"Because of the emphasis." Feldman leaned forward eagerly. " Imagine this: A pink haze fills the air. Huxley is standing in a field full of, well, green stuff. His wife comes toward him, dressed in white. He reaches for her, but she floats away. He goes after her, but she stays just out of reach. It'll be a dance sequence. We'll get Lois Harper and Donelle...Torpenheim is writing the score...

At the end of it, Huxley is standing by his wife's grave, looking down. Then he wakes up—and she's really gone. A movie moment, I promise you."

"Why does it have to be a dream? Why can't you show Huxley's thoughts—maybe a retrospective of their marriage...?

"Because a dream gives it more emphasis. A dream gives it more expression. A dream—"

Just then Colton's white phone rang. He picked it up, while glancing at his ID list. "Jimmy? This is really a bad time—What?... Brick Butler?... He does? Well, I don't think the public is ready for another 'Star Cars' movie...oh, he wrote the script..."

And just then Colton's red phone rang. "Miss March, what?...Will I see Romulus Raven? Absolutely not. In the first place, I'm talking to my director. In the second place, I've got Jimmy Cox on the phone, and he thinks he can get us Brick Butler. In the third place I don't ever want to see that son-of-a-bitch again. Throw him out." Colton hung up the red phone. He said into the white receiver "Jimmy, I'll get back to you on that." He hung the white phone up too. Then he looked at Feldman and shook his head. "Romulus Raven used to work for me. He was one of the biggest directors in the business."

Feldman frowned. "I never heard of him."

"No...you wouldn't have. Raven doesn't direct anymore, and he never will again. He makes the rounds of the studios now, begging for work, any kind—even a janitor's job. Which he can't do and can't keep."

"It seems to be a very personal thing with you."

"Personal? Yes...I suppose it is. I guess you never heard of Lorna Laverne either."

(Continued on page 74)
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Mary Gunn

Memories of My Irish Great Grandfather

He always sat
in the same chair by the fire
to the left-hand side
but slightly in front of it—

a permanent fixture
in that sturdy wooden chair,
the only chair that
I remember with arm rests.

He was a tall man
who sat upright in his chair.
I don't remember him
looking old.

I never saw him
get up and walk
while I was there;
preferring his solid seat.

His walking stick
was always by his side
or in his hand yet
I never saw him use it.

Perhaps, just having it
within his reach
gave him the confidence
that comes with independence.

Yet, there is a family photo
of the four generations
in which he stands
tall and erect, without a stick.

He lived with
my granny's brother;
his wife and their children
just over the road from gran.

I can't remember now
if he talked much to me
or if he talked to me at all
but I have a warm feeling

towards him so I guess
he must have talked to me
about something.
He probably enjoyed me…

Back then, aged three,
I was his first
great grandchild.
He was ninety-seven.

On reflection,
with a three year old
on the loose
around the kitchen

great granddad Cassidy
was probably wise
not to get out of
that armchair by the fire!



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"But that's the high point of the picture."

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Feldman frowned. "I never heard of him."

"No...you wouldn't have. Raven doesn't direct anymore, and he never will again. He makes the rounds of the studios now, begging for work, any kind—even a janitor's job. Which he can't do and can't keep."

"It seems to be a very personal thing with you."

"Personal? Yes...I suppose it is. I guess you never heard of Lorna Laverne either."

Feldman thought for a few seconds. "No, I can't say that I have."

"She wasn't famous, but she would have been. She wasn't a star, but she had star quality. Lorna didn't have a 'bad' side. She photographed beautifully from every angle. The modeling of her face was perfect. When she faced the camera directly her eyes and lips made love to it. Lorna was a natural actress, and never had a lesson. She knew exactly when to move; exactly what to say and how to say it. I was bringing her on, little by little. Bit parts first. Then would have come supporting roles. Finally the perfect vehicle to introduce her as a star." Colton paused and closed his eyes.

"What happened?" Feldman prodded.

"Romulus Raven," Colton growled. "She fell in love with him. And he fell in love with her—as far as a rat bastard like that could fall in love with anyone. He decided to set up his own studio and use Lorna's beauty

and talent to make it succeed. She had a contract with us—all actors and actresses did then—but there was a loophole that made it possible for her to buy her way out if she wanted to leave. Raven put up the money—he had it then. She was free, and they were married."

"So? Did Romulus Raven open a studio? Did they make a picture?"

"Yes," Colton said grimly. "It was a piece of junk called 'Log Cabin', about a pioneer family. The concept was all wrong, the editing was choppy, the script was terrible, and the actors were worse. Except for Lorna, of course. She was great. But she couldn't save that movie. Raven put a fortune into that movie and so did his investors. They lost it all. Then everything went to pieces.

Raven always had a drinking problem, but he'd kept it under control. Now he was dunk all the time. One day he was driving—drunk, of course—down a busy business street, at better than sixty miles an hour. Lorna was with him. He went through a red light and collided with another car. He wasn't hurt, and neither was the other driver. Lorna—Lorna—"

"Was she killed?"

"No. In a way it was worse than that. There were no airbags in those days. Lorna's head went right through the windshield. Her lovely face was destroyed."

Feldman slumped in his chair. "Oh my God," he whispered.

"The plastic surgeons did what they could, but it wasn't much. Not the smallest part of Lorna's beauty could be restored. She would be horribly scarred for the rest of her life." Colton sighed heavily and continued. "The marriage was over. Now that she couldn't be useful to him any longer, Ravel didn't want Lorna. He left her with nothing. Ravel became a drunken panhandler.

"What happened to Lorna?" Feldman asked, not sure he really wanted to know.

"She works here."

""She does?"

"Lorna's a seamstress in our costume department. If you've been back there you might have seen her. A woman who always wears a scarf and never raises her head."

"I don't think..." then Feldman realized he had noticed a woman wearing a scarf; noticed her only because she had lifted her face slightly and he had seen the disfiguring scars. "Look, plastic surgery has come a long way in the past few years. Maybe there's something that could be done now..."

Colby looked wearily at Feldman. "Don't you think I know that? Don't you think I've tried? I've taken Lorna to every doctor in the country who promised any sort of hope. The most anyone can do is give her a sort of mask. But I haven't given up. Maybe someday..." He dropped his head.

That's when Feldman realized the truth. "You're in love with her. You were in love with her then, and you're in love with her now."

Colby nodded. "And I've got a wife and three kids." Then he straightened up, his face impassive. Once more he was a businessman. Now about that dream sequence—"

"No," Feldman said gently. "I've changed my mind. Tragedy is too real to cheapen it with a dream."

Anne Britting Oleson

Chanteuse

The child listens to her mother sing
and does not know how beautiful it is:
the mother pegging laundry out in the dew
of early morning, singing of stormy weather—
life is bare, gloom and mis'ry everywhere.
The child leans against an apple tree
and runs her fingers through the new grass,
leaves fluttering overhead pale and useless
as a baby's hands. She hears a sadness
she doesn't understand and shies away from it.
Shirtsleeves catch and billow in the breeze,
a bedsheet flaps. The child turns her cheek
to the rough bark, fighting against
the thickness of tears clogging her throat.
The mother's voice moans like the wind:
I'm so weary all the time, so weary all the time.

The Prodigal

He's gone again, and I can't help
breathe a sigh of relief.
The father of my children,
one dead, three living, including
a three months' child, a girl
who disappointed in every way save
that he called her by his true love's name.
Not mine--never mine:
he'd rather she'd borne the babe
than I; he'd urged her on me
as a nurse. She, who bears
his soft caresses and softer words,
while I receive only his animal seed,
bring forth in pain his heirs.
He's gone again, taking his opium-
induced night fears with him, leaving
me, this spring, to step outside
into the weak promise of sun,
to watch the boys, long pent,
frolic along the river bank.



1940 Doing the Laundry. Photo courtesy of the City of New York

Jeremy Da Rosa

The Horthrace

The Horthrace is a small, canine-sized hybrid most commonly observed in the oral folklore of older Germanic families in the western United States.

Generally described as having a shaggy and dog-like body (typically a retriever or other long-haired variant) with the upper body of a prepubescent boy, the Horthrace might be considered a more whimsical cousin of the Centaur or Satyr. Rather than displaying the lascivious or aggressive tendencies of similar beings, mythologist Lukas Schekter noted the Horthrace to be more of "an unfortunate and obsequious companion in the misadventures of adolescent girls," and is often "used as a scapegoat or other object to absorb blame or culpability when something goes awry."

In an early 19th century German poem scrawled on the underside of a Bavarian end table Schekter discovered in California, the Horthrace is depicted as:

"A pallid, moon-faced youth,
Sentimental and still of tongue.
An object of derision and verbal abuse
for maidens: 'Ya, the Horthrace has come.'"

Folktales around the Horthrace involve him being servile and timid, and often the butt of jokes and scorn for young women in the midst of light misfortune. One well-known tale tells of a betrothed maiden who was discovered in the throes of an unbreakable slumber at the tolling of the bells for her matrimonial ceremony. She could not be stirred into wakefulness until the next day, by which time the groom had given up hope and deserted her.

The maiden, of course, claimed the Horthrace had appeared the night before and lulled her to sleep with softly spoken questions about assisting with various wedding preparations. When she awoke at long last, the Horthrace had vanished and all she had as proof of her ill-timed visit was a small tuft of fur reputedly from the tail of her guest.

Though mostly accepted as imaginary, the Horthrace is held in similar regard as the Christmas Elf in American holiday lore. He can be expected to visit any gathering of only young women (though not in public places) and will usually tend to minor requests of the group and cause a mild nuisance with his presence.



Milo James Fowler

Veronica Smythe and the Dreamboat of Oak Valley High

I'm not a pervert. Everybody fantasizes now and then. They say it's healthy, a natural part of being human, equally prevalent among members of both sexes. Just think back to the last TV show you watched. Weren't there some cute guys on it? Maybe a few hot girls? Seriously, that's why we watch half the stuff we do, for the eye candy. And what about the last time you went out for dinner? Or to the beach? *Don't tell me you didn't spot an attractive member or two of the human race out there. You'd be blind not to notice. God made us sexual creatures, after all.*

But I've got to admit, I might take it to the extreme every now and then. Instead of spotting a solid hunk and going, "Hey Veronica, look at that beefcake. Ain't he a cool sip of lemonade?" I usually launch immediately into fantasies where said hunk is shirtless, with broad well-defined pecs and a ribbed abdomen, tanned by the sun (not a spray bottle), and he's either gazing deeply into my eyes while giving me a foot massage, or we're already in the throes of some hard and heavy primal mating rituals.

The thing is, they never notice me staring—or, on occasion, drooling a little bit. I'm one of those girls who blend in to the surroundings, you see. Five foot two, maybe twenty pounds over the "Vogue limit," freckled and easily sunburned. *Those are my better qualities.* I won't go into how often I have to wax my forearms, my upper lip, and between my eyebrows to keep them in line. I'm pretty sure my dad was part Wookie, and I apparently inherited most of his genes.

I work in the front office of Oak Valley High School, pride of Temecula, California. Let me tell you, there are some pretty awesome-looking studs who pass through here on a regular basis. Not students—OMG no! I told you I'm not a pervert. *That wouldn't even be legal.* I'm easily ten years older than most of them. I mean the coaching staff, and one in particular - *Mmm-mmm, good.*

Did I mention that my daytime fantasies often turn into dreams that carry me through the night? That's when I really do my heavy drooling, right into the pillow, sopping wet by the time I wake up in the morning. Some of my most memorable encounters occur in my dreams when I have the whole bed to myself and eight hours or more to really let my fantasies run wild—

"You like that, Veronica?"

I jolt upright at my desk and stare at Coach Willis. Goodness, he is a tall drink of ice tea on a hot day. He teaches P.E. for the freshmen and sophomore boys, and he's in charge of our JV basketball team. I've seen him out there running laps with the kids—isn't that cool? He doesn't just stand there with a clipboard and bark orders at them; he goes through the drills right along with them. *And oh my yes, he and I have spent plenty of nights together in my dreams.*

He smiles down at me with those naturally white teeth, a stark contrast to his natural tan. Everything about him is completely God-given, from his wide shoulders to the way his chest muscles stretch that turquoise, microfiber Polo with our school logo on it.

"Hello?" *I sound pathetic.*

His smile broadens as he chuckles. "You look like you're really enjoying your work." He gestures at the spreadsheet in front of me, the one I should be updating, but I'm goggling at him instead.

"Oh no. Not this." I shrug. "No…"

I want to ask him, "Is there something I can do for you?" but I'm afraid it will come out like it did in my dream last night, the one where he breathed into my ear, "You like that, Veronica?" And then I'll start sweating, because that's exactly what he said just a moment ago! Is it possible we share some kind of extra-sensory connection? Does he somehow know I've been fantasizing about him? And now he's come to me—

"Got a minute?" He leans against the wall beside my desk.

For you? I have forever! But I would never say that outside of my bedroom, alone in the dark.

"Yes, Coach Willis—"

"Alan."

"Okay?" I cringe. *What's wrong with me today? I've got to calm down. He can't possibly know that I spent most of the night with him naked, swinging in a hammock on a Caribbean coastline…*

Get a grip, Veronica.

"I was wondering if you could check on my sick days—how many I've got left."

"Are you feeling under the weather?" My fingers fly over the keyboard, but my eyes remain on Alan.

"Uh—you might want to close that first." He's looking at my screen. The spreadsheet. I've managed to

overwrite three of the cells with complete gibberish.
"Sick days. Right." I close out the program without saving it, and Alan sharply draws in his breath. "That's okay, I'll take care of it later." He blinks and nods as I open another file. "Sick days, sick days. All right Coach Willis, it looks to me that you have four remaining. Would you like me to fill out the STAR for you?" (Staff Time Away Request).
You're a STAR, he told me last night. My cheeks heat up, all the way to the ends of my ears.
"You're a star," he tells me now, and he winks like he knows exactly what I'm thinking. "Could you make it for this Friday?"
I'm pretty sure I'm staring again. And I might be drooling just a little. "This Friday?" I nod, but then I frown. "You already know you're going to be sick?"
Another wink. He leans onto my desk, muscles rippling under that beautiful shirt. *What I wouldn't give to see him tear it off right here, right now.* "You gonna tell?"
"No?" There I go again with that annoying interrogative inflection at the end.
"Good girl." He half-turns to glance over his shoulder, and his biceps flex. "Glad to know I have at least one ally around here."
"You're being silly. Everybody loves Coach Willis." *I know I sure do.* My fingers do their thing on the keyboard, this time filling out his STAR for Friday, and I split my attention between the screen and the Greek god before me.
He winces a little. "That might be about to change."
"Oh?" I swallow. My fingers slow down. *Will he take me right here on my desk, consequences be damned?*
"Yeah." He gazes down at the industrial carpet between his sneakers. "You know Autumn Hayes?"
The name doesn't ring a bell. But then again, I'm more familiar with guys' names, the ones I probably gasp in my sleep: Brad (Pitt), Ryan (Gosling), Matthew (McConaughey), etc.
"She's eighteen, but I doubt it'll make much difference," he mutters.
I remember Autumn Hayes, the only senior who didn't walk at graduation last year. She's had to repeat most of her 2nd semester classes this fall.
"A student?" My fingers have stopped altogether. The STAR form sits on the screen, half-completed.
Alan blows out a sigh and nods, bracing both arms against my desk and arching his back, hanging his head now. "It won't look good, I know. But we—I didn't do anything wrong."
"You..." I can't find the right words. *They all sound too crude. "You screwed a student? I thought I knew you!" But no, of course I don't say that. "Do you love her?" Nope, not that either.* "I mean..."
"She's a legal adult, you know." He fixes me with those gorgeous blues, but they're icy now. "You get that, right?"
Do I? Well, let me see. A solid hunk like him can't get enough action with women his own age—like me, for instance—so he's got to go trawling Oak Valley High for barely legal seniors? Interfering with their education? Getting them pregnant before they even have a chance to make a life for themselves? Putting them on welfare with a bright future full of food stamps? Maybe I'm just letting my imagination get the best of me. But as you can probably tell by now, that's something I excel at.

I close out the STAR form without saving it.
"Hey—" Coach Willis points at the screen open-mouthed.
"You'll have to go through HR for this. I can't in good conscience submit a form for a sick day in advance, not when you appear to be in perfect health." *Believe it or not, those are the exact words than came streaming out of my mouth. Not bad, eh?*
He stands up straight like his spine has turned to iron. His features are slack, his eyes dull now. Nothing at all like the Adonis I spent last night with.
Without a word, he turns on his heel and exits the office.

I'm pretty sure that's the last I'll see of him, in my dreams, at least.



Robert Bates

Glory

I've waited my whole life for this. It's the state championship game and we are down by one point. I dribble past the midcourt line while the crowd is counting down the seconds.

"Five! Four!"

Sweat drips in my eye but I can still see Devon open and waving for the pass. He's supposed to take the last shot, but he doesn't understand. This is my moment. I can already see that championship ring on my finger.

"Three! Two!"

This is it. I jab step and drive, successfully getting around the defender. With a victorious smirk on my face, I jump in the air, raise my elbow, and release at the top of my jump just like coach taught me. The ball begins its perfect arc towards the rim and I can feel the whole gym watching me in my moment of glory.

I miss.

Knockout

"Mark wants to beat your ass," Julian had warned me at the beginning of the school day.

More like Mark is *going* to beat my ass. Everyone knows I can't fight. I sit in my seat wondering what will happen next.

Julian sees my worried face and says, "Relax, I got your back."

The teacher walks out and I can feel Mark watching me.

Rachel whispers, "It'll be really funny if you win," into my ear from her seat beside me.

I turn and Mark is in my face. He pushes me and I instinctively push him back.

He hits me. Then I'm on the ground. Completely disoriented.

I wait for another punch to come but it never does. I finally regain my senses and get up to see Julian holding Mark with his arms pinned behind his back.

"If you are going to do something, do it now," he says, struggling to hold him.

I hit Mark three times with my left hand then he elbows Julian and breaks free. He charges at me and before I can react his fist connects with my jaw.

I wake up with Rachel in my face.

"That was pretty funny too."

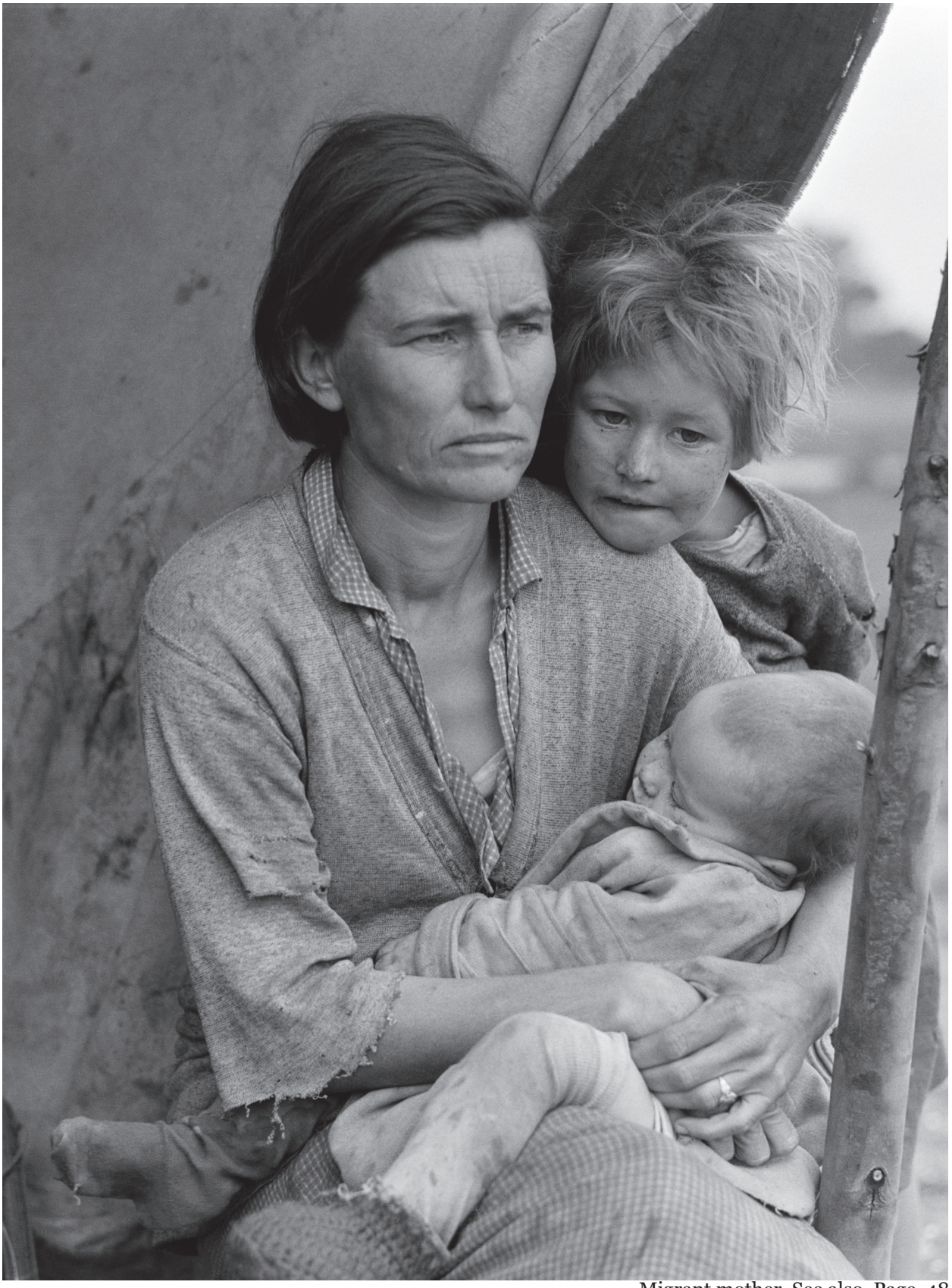
Dorothea Lange

Dorothea Lange (05/1895 – 10/1965) was best known for her Depression-era photographs for the Farm Security Administration (FSA).

Lange's photographs humanized the consequences of the Great Depression and influenced the development of documentary photography.



Lang with her camera, atop car. 1936



Migrant mother. See also, Page 48



The Arnold children, Michigan Hill, Washington, 1939



Migrant agricultural worker's family, Nipomo, California



On Arizona Highway 87, south of Chandler. Maricopa County, Arizona. Children in a democracy.



Poor mother and children, Oklahoma,_1936



Power farming displaces tenants, Childress County, Texas



Toward Los Angeles - 1937

