

The Bend

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Number Three

University of Notre Dame

The Bend
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Our graduate M.F.A. Creative Writing program is a two-year literary immersion. We offer workshops with nationally acclaimed writers and literature classes with a distinguished Department of English faculty. Our community is small and congenial (we admit ten writers a year), and part of a large and lively intellectual community in the larger English department. We have a diverse group of all ages and backgrounds and offer a year-round program of visitors and readings. All students write a thesis—a collection of stories or creative nonfiction, a novel, or a collection of poetry—and work closely with a thesis advisor.

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Editor's Note

Since this year's issue of *The Bend* has found its way to you, one can almost comfortably assume a handful of things about you: that you are at least passably familiar with Notre Dame's Creative Writing Program, and also, perhaps, with some of the writers and poets whose work this journal chronicles. This third volume, like all the others, is a way for graduates and friends of the program to share—however momentarily—a glimpse of their work and often their lives with one another. For the reader I've imagined and for any reader, these pages are likely enjoyable and worthwhile reading: some of the latest poems, essays, and stories our writers and poets have to offer. For those writers and poets, however, these pages amount to the really top-notch sort of letters back home.

The Bend: Number Three features work that approaches precisely this sentiment. Since all writing has its origin not only in its author, but also in a place—real or imagined, ideal or heartbreaking—it is fitting that this year's contributors have chosen to share with you pieces aimed at or emanating from home.

Their enormous talents and generosity has earned my gratitude and admiration. As ever, the guidance and support of William O'Rourke and all of the Creative Writing Program, but especially the innumerable favors of Coleen Hoover and the advice of Timothy Chilcote and Kevin Hatstrup—my fellow editors—have proven invaluable.

Lastly, I am grateful to you, our friends and readers, and this book is my thank-you note.

I hope that you'll enjoy it.

Dylan R. Reed
Notre Dame, Indiana, April 2006

Renée E. D'Aoust

Body of a Dancer

The body of a dancer is tired before it is worn out. The back fails. The adductors fail. The neck muscles are too loose. The neck muscles are too tight. The extension is too low. The extension is never high enough.

In the summer of 1993, my body was recovering from a serious back injury. I'd strained the lower back muscles of the erector spinae group doing the choreography of one of the teachers at the University of Montana while at the American College Dance Festival. Gus Solomons jr. was judging, and the piece made it into the final performances. But I'd spent the entire college dance festival on my back in a motel room in Ogden, Utah. I literally could not move.

The teacher had been very nice—she'd given me flowers—but secretly I blamed her movement—I *blamed her*—for injuring my back. She incorporated spirals into and out of the floor in her choreography but gave no instruction on how to use your abdominal muscles to protect against over-twisting your back. It's a common mistake of an amateur or beginning choreographer to expect a dancer to recreate movement by imitation rather than by technique. A choreographer doesn't have time to teach technique in rehearsal, but since a dancer usually works for next to nothing, the least a beginning choreographer can do is not ruin her body.

After two months of inactivity, I auditioned for a summer scholarship to the Graham school sponsored by the Montana Dance Arts Association. They'd brought in Myra Woodruff to adjudicate. Myra was currently in the Graham Company and later I heard she became Maurice Béjart's muse.

I won the scholarship everyone wanted: Graham. By then I wanted out of Montana. I'd moved there from Seattle, which is where I had grown up. In Montana I expected to find a cowboy and live on a ranch. Lots of cowboys know how to dance even if it is just line dancing. But instead, I found dance studios for the second time in my life and started moving my body. Alone. Inside. No cowboy. I wanted to dance. My body had to move. My body could barely move.

To this day, I can tell you the injuries of all my friends. I can tell you their physical problems more than I can tell you their family history. I can tell you that my friend Stef has trouble with her neck and sometimes with a knee. I can tell you my friend Heather injured her left calf muscle and that she was terrified because she'd never had an injury before. She didn't know what the rest of us were talking about when we said a strained muscle hurt so badly. I can tell you my friend Mara had trouble with her lower back. I can tell about another friend who had a herniated disk and spent six immovable months on her back. The doctors told her she would never dance again, and she told me she couldn't imagine her life without dance. I can tell you almost everyone at the Martha Graham Center for Contemporary Dance had trouble with their lower backs. I can tell you my friend Sandra occasionally has a glitch in her hip. I can tell you about a young woman named Kathleen who was slated for the New York City Ballet Company whose teacher ripped out the muscles in her right hip

area because he forced the leg to her ear to show her she wasn't working hard enough. That teacher was Perry Brunson. He was an amazing teacher. Placement, alignment, discipline. We lost him all those years ago to Kaposi's Sarcoma. That was at the beginning of AIDS. We didn't say AIDS back then.

Don't tell anyone about the aches and pains. The body of a dancer is a perfect instrument. It is honed. Even when it shows the effort with modern dance (as opposed to showing no effort with ballet), the body is still a tool, an expression of the soul. And if the soul isn't interesting... forget it. *The body*, Martha Graham says, *never lies*.

My body lied all the time. The tiny spot on the front right of my hip, on the top of my iliac crest, was on fire by the end of my dancing life. I couldn't let anyone touch it; the pain sent my face grimacing, involuntarily. I didn't tell anyone I used to spend days in bed, trying to get my low back to release the spasm. In rehearsal, I often wore a flexible neoprene back brace. There was Velcro on one side, and I wrapped it tightly around my lower back. The neoprene held my sacrum together. I wore green polypro shorts over the top of the brace to warm up my hips. My boyfriend Chris followed me from Montana to New York City, and he would bring me aspirin while I lay in bed. Then we tried ibuprofen. Then we settled on naproxen, using the product Aleve.

I remember Chris begging me to lift weights, to try some toning exercises for my muscles, to re-think the way I was training my body. He also told me to lose weight—I was 5'5" and 118 pounds—and it pissed me off so much, I didn't do anything else he suggested. I should have. Maybe I would still be dancing.

Maybe not. They say there are three kinds of dancers: 1. Those who dance when younger and never dance again; 2. Those who dance professionally and move on; and 3. Those who dance professionally and then move on into careers in dance, teaching and/or choreographing. My own personal opinion is that there is a fourth kind of dancer: The one for whom dance never leaves the heart; dance is the purest expression of life; it is movement without voice; movement that is a gift of the body.

The body of a dancer has an ache in the right ankle. Or the right big toe. Or maybe the dancer fell and hurt the coccyx and bruised the tail.

"Remember the tail," says the first dance teacher, trying to get her students to lengthen their backs, to stand up straight. "You still have a tail," she'll say to her class of eight-year-olds, "so use it!"

The body of a dancer has an ache in her abdomen. The doctor has never seen such abdominal muscles. He's never seen such a loosey-goosey leggy person before. He's never seen someone so thin. The dancer doesn't have anorexia. Not most anyway. Most have control. That's different.

The body of a dancer has shin splints up the front of the leg. She has a bunion from her years as a ballet dancer before she became a modern dancer. She has no toenails. Now as a modern dancer, she has floor burns up and down her spine. She has skin splits on the bottoms of her feet, and she wraps the splits with Elastacon, an expensive medical tape sometimes used on horses. The pharmacy on Eighth Avenue and 53rd carries Elastacon just for modern dancers and all the Broadway gypsy dancers.

The modern dancer's mind is just as twisted as the ballet dancer's mind. She thinks she is too tall,

too short, too fat, too thin (oops, never too thin), too blonde, too brunette, too pale, too dark, too too something to be a dancer. She is wrong for the part. She is not wrong for the part. Her body is wrong for the part. But her body is *her*. There is absolutely no difference. Her body is the instrument, and she is the instrument.

When I moved to New York City in the summer of 1993, I wanted to get trained. Then, I thought, I'll see what I want to do with a trained body. I was twenty-five-years old. Old for a dancer. Even a modern dancer. After eight years training in ballet as a kid, I'd left ballet at the age of sixteen. I declared I wanted a broader focus to my life, but it was also true that I had started to realize I would not become a principal or even a soloist, and I didn't want to be part of the corps. Maybe in a different era, Margot Fonteyn's era, I could have made principal. Danced *Swan Lake*. Maybe not. After ballet, my broader focus had included finishing high school and then travel and different jobs and finally university. I had the opportunity to come back and dance again. Myra Woodruff gave me the chance.

New York City. I was willing to bleed for my art. But I wasn't willing to die for it. I made a distinction in my mind because I'd seen death at the Pacific Northwest Ballet School in Seattle, Washington. I'd seen a woman who was skin and bones, a woman who probably didn't live, a woman who was a warning to my dancing life. I'd seen her, and I remembered her. I never knew her name, but I saw each rib. I saw her collar bones. I saw the protrusion of each vertebrae. She had no pubic hair.

I'd seen the hollows of her eyes. She had looked me directly in the eye in the dressing room. I was ten years old. She must have been sixteen or eighteen or maybe even twenty. She'd looked at me, and I had stared back, and I had heard her words in my head, "I am dying." I remembered.

My mother had seen this girl, too, and delayed my enrollment at the Pacific Northwest Ballet School for an entire year because of it. My mother figured, rightly, that if there was a skeleton dancer walking around Pacific Northwest Ballet, they were not the sort of dance school where she wanted her daughter training. Instead I attended the Cornish School of the Arts and trained with Noel Mason, who had danced with the Joffrey Ballet. When Ms. Mason moved from Cornish to Pacific Northwest Ballet School a year later, I followed. For the next three years after that, I was Clara in *The Nutcracker*—Michael Smuin's version, not the Kent Stowell and Maurice Sendak version that later became so popular.

Francia Russell, the director of the school, said to me, "You're perfect for Clara because you are much more of an actress than a dancer."

It was a condescending compliment. I couldn't handle her honesty, but I did appreciate it. That's why, at sixteen, when Francia Russell told me the most I could hope for as a ballet dancer was as a corps member in some Midwestern third-tier company, I decided to quit. My excuse was that I would act. But really, something inside died. An ex-dancer knows what I mean. The dancer's identity is the body. When I left ballet, I left my identity. None of my dance classmates phoned. I had succumbed to failure. I did not have the biology. My extension was not high enough. I had breasts. I would never be a ballet dancer. I was nothing.

At the age of twenty-five, I had a lot to prove as a modern dancer. But I had placement and turn-out and good arches and musicality and presence. Ballet had given me all that. I was ready—in

modern—to learn. I worked harder than all my classmates. I had lost years. I couldn't waste a second.

In the summer of 1993, I felt I'd been given a second-chance to dance, and that was all I wanted to do. Dance. I was home. In my body. In the body of a dancer. Or what would soon be the body of a dancer. There was much to do: shape the thighs; get the turn-out working again; get the extension going; develop strength; balance. And jump. And land without hopping. God, I loved to jump. To leap.

To fly to the sky and never ever land. To take to the heavens. The blue expanse holds me there.

I. Hips

The ball-and-socket joint of the hip gets a knockout workout in a dancer's career. There are many dancers who need hip replacement surgery later in life. There are other dancers who hobble around on strong legs that stick out from loose and unstable hips. The ligaments become so stretched that the hip joint itself becomes mush. Mush at one of the major joints of the body is not helpful to the integrity of movement, even simple walking. (However, if you've had Graham training, you know that walking is not simple.)

II. Knees

"Turn-out comes from the hip," says the responsible ballet teacher. Turn-out means that the part of the thighs that usually touch against each other should face forward. The muscles of the hip can open the legs and feet. Where the angle of the feet lands is where the turn-out starts. Many dancers get an extra bit of turn-out by improperly forcing their foot out farther than the muscles of the hip can hold it. All the pressure of that extra, improper twist goes straight into the knee joint.

Knee crawls are also injurious to the knees, causing bursitis in some and bruising in others. This is the Graham movement also called knee *bouffées* where a dancer travels rapidly across the stage on the knees. Bruising can be ignored; bursitis cannot. I had bruising. I never had bursitis. The knees can represent the way dancers think of physical therapists: Occasionally a physical therapist might be helpful; usually not. Sometimes a physical therapist is more helpful to a dancer after a performing career than during. Physical therapists who don't know what they are talking about will suggest a dancer wear a knee brace or tape the knees. There is no way taping a knee joint is possible for a dancer. The taping restricts movement far too much. A dancer can tape skin splits on the feet and wear a flexible neoprene brace on the back, but neoprene knee braces or taping is too constrictive. Physical therapists always say a patient should listen to the pain. Respect the pain. A dancer knows pain must be endured. This is why dancers don't think much of most physical therapists.

III. Drugs

Aleve is the over-the-counter drug of choice for dancers. A bottle should always be on hand in the dance bag—preferably a black leather dance bag. Drugs are an important component of training dancers. Pain medication is never advised, but its use is known and widespread. At the time I stopped dancing, I normally ingested 4 Aleve tablets per day. I also took Tums for stomach pain. I also placed Chinese plasters over my lower back, rubbed Tiger Balm (extra strength) on my hips—once and only once getting it on my genitals—took an Epsom salt bath every night, massaged my feet every night without any oil (didn't want to soften my callused feet), and wore sweatpants to sleep even in summer. My boyfriend smelled the Tiger Balm but wisely said nothing.

IV. Food Groups

No matter what happens, if it is something good or bad, related to dance or not, my emotional reaction can be stated as, “I feel fat.” Is fat an emotional state or physical state? Is there a difference? No matter what happens, whether I am hungry or not, whether I see what is on my plate or not, I always feel I eat too much.

Coffee is a food group. Cigarettes (although I never smoked them) are a food group. Half a cup of cottage cheese plus one banana should be enough for lunch. If you eat a bagel, toast it (dancers say toasting bread helps get rid of the starch), and never ever put butter or cream cheese on your bagel.

V. Feet

Bunions are the biggest problem for the feet, especially for former ballet dancers, but for modern dancers, too. The bone on the distal end of the first metatarsal becomes misshapen. It aches. If you have been turning out your leg from your knee, rather than from the hip, you are more susceptible to bunions. If you have floor splits, floor burns, or blisters on the soles of your feet, buy Elastacon. Wrap your feet to protect the skin. Never, ever use lotion on your feet. You want tough, hard skin.

VI. Other

The dancer visits chiropractors, massage therapists, Pilates instructors, Gyrotonics instructors, acupuncturists, Rolfers, quack doctors, and fitness gurus. Usually the dancer gets a reduced rate. Often she’ll find a chiropractor who used to be a dancer. She’ll try any remedy for any number of ailments. She’ll get her astrological chart done if she thinks it will help. She’ll visit a psychic on the street.

Neck injuries. Lower back muscle strains. Calf muscles strains. Joint sprains. Concussions. Broken bones are rare except for the occasional rib or the metatarsals. Those get broken a lot.

Spirit. The spirit can be broken but not from an aching body. The spirit is broken because often the dancer’s dream is unattainable. The dancer dreams of being a star. There are very few stars in the dance world. Very few. This realization dawns slowly.

And then the pain sets in. And the pain sets in deeper. And you keep dancing because you must, because you realize you are a gambler, and you realize if you cannot get that split fall just right you will never succeed at life. If your *plié* does not improve, and quick, you will fail in the world. Your center is working overtime, and you do not hear reason. There is no reason. Only movement. A certain psychosis takes over. You are not willing to die, exactly, but you are willing to move and to move and to move. You even move when you can barely get out of bed.

So I moved in the dance studios of Martha Graham. I began contracting. The Graham contraction hollows out the abdomen so that it looks like a sail filled with air. The spine is the webbing of the sail. The legs are the ropes off the canvas. I got myself a scholarship for the year-long program, which led to the Professional Training Certificate. And I contracted and contracted.

I didn’t listen to reason. I felt that my heart could encompass the sky because I was home in a dancer’s body, and there was no place else I wanted to be.

Tony D'Souza

The Hall

There's a hall in a snow-mantled northland
that bears on its lintel the horns of a ram
between pole-pines and cedar in winter coats
of the three darkest shades of green and black
where all the animals I've killed live again.
Six bucks nestled down in their boney tines.
A black bear that slumbers in its honeydew hair.
A hundred angry francolins with their fierce eyes.
Forty thumping hare, and a forest of gray squirrel.
There's a skunk, and snakes on a shelf in coils:
three adders with their gummy mouths, five lithe
cobras black as rivers, a racer, a green mountain rattler
whose rasping tail again startles the air. Three black
scorpions in chitinous skins defend the darkest corner.
The mallards are proud still; emerald heads preened,
blue insignia mark their wings. There are pintails,
buffleheads, black and red mergansers; a swan, snipe,
a lonesome snow goose. There are coots in their long
webbed fingers. All the waterfowl cackle; they're
as raucous as the day I killed them. A red-winged
blackbird sings on the table, its neck unbroken
from the marble I slung at it when I was young,
hidden in the rushes of the neighborhood pond; the first
and longest occupant of this place; the only songbird.
And quail, too many to number, scratch false livings
from under the long table in their many colored coats,
where a great raft of band-tailed pigeons bob and strut.
Then there are the fish: flashing schools in a tremendous
tank: trevally, trout, blue gill, crappie, catfish, sunfish, perch,
muskellunge, small-mouthed bass and large; a few king
salmon, jaws snarled with the spawn, a single red grouper.
The tank teems with mullet. The trout are rainbows
and browns. The marbled snails I stepped on in Sweden
slide slow trajectories along every hand-hewn bench.

The rough floor is slick with nightcrawlers; minnows flash in the goblets and urns. The close air glimmers with lightning bugs, the walls crawl with ants, hard shelled roaches. The bush pigs snort, the agouti whistle and gnaw, the lahou birds shriek, the striped gazelle brings its hind hoof forward to scratch its delicate chin.

And then there are the people:

two fetuses I decided not to have now asking for oatmeal in their bloody pulps. The roadblock soldier in Ivory Coast who'd make me sing at gunpoint, who slapped me, who I wished dead aloud in the village for two years, he's here, his face unscarred from the mob who burned him. There's the Kashmiri the Israeli I traveled with knifed over a few dollars of hash; his wounds erased; he's wearing a linen lungi, looks dapper and clean like waiting for tea; there's no blood seeping through his shirt, his fingers; this time he isn't struggling to breathe. There's the Mumbai haridan I watched from my aunt's window expire on the curb, how he fought it, rolling his head as though simply trying to stay awake, pedestrians stepping over him to market, to work; his nails are cut, his long beard is white and combed. The two Swiss brothers who died in their sleep across the kibbutz hall; I'd stolen their radio and they knew it, the rocket fell on them. They're dewy, slim, bowing their violins again.

Seated at the long table

waiting on a feast I know I'm supposed to provide the African looks smart in his uniform, the Indians have oiled their hair. The Swiss boys play a minuet and everyone is happy. All about them are the women I used and left, saying to each other across the table's breadth, 'He screwed you over, too?' At the head sits Helene Adjo, who I beat up, at the lee Nicole, who I abandoned in DC. They are as beautiful as I remember: the fragrances, the languages; most are unreasonably kind: married Mariama will be ready to serve the food, Stockholm Sarah will offer cigarettes and a smile to everybody. Then there is Paul

from Harare. What will he do among these women?
It's a right old party,
most of my family here. My father, of course, whose
race I denied, and all the other Indians whose blood
I denied. And the Georgia hillbilly whites in overalls
from my mothers' side who I denied as well, stiff
and uncomfortable that they have to be here among
all this color. My mother's here because she's ashamed.
Her injured girlfriend's here too, her extended family.
Behind them are the women of my village who begged me
not to abandoned them to the war. One girl here has a disease
I gave her; a few Freiburg burghers have appeared whose homes
I robbed. In the near corners are the misc&sundry:
strangers I prank-called as a kid, said I was a doctor, sorry
that their children had died; and the obese girl in my class
whose wrong I can't even remember. And in the shadow
and considering the mysteries of the fire, my sister bears
with folded arms all the years I teased her.
All this and more in a hall
in a snow-mantled northland, and though on this winter
night there is nothing about but snow, my tracks in it;
a wide moon, empty space between the tall cedars
where a hall might be: nothing but myself and my regrets,
the years reaching away on every side, still I know
there is a hall, and that it fills and fills. One day I must
enter it: and the sudden silence, and the turning eyes.

Sonnenizio on a Line from Donne

Batter my heart, three-personed God, for You,
haven't been enough for me. You're not three, or there.
You, as is in the world, can't free me thrice, or even
once from my three great vices: women, drink, art.
I don't know You, suppose I don't want to. Three-fold
manifestations of aches I've had at 3 in the morning
have revealed three and a million aspects of You,
and none. Three friends of mine have died already,
and I'm only thirty this year. And so fear's weight
trebles on my soul as the years mount my flesh.
Where are You? I once saw a triplet of sycamores, lights
in them, paused a moment, two, three, almost believed.
Three-quarter time beats simple marches in the churches.
Three times this month, hunting, I've sought You in marshes.

Kathleen Canavan

Coffee Shop

—for Valerie

He walked to her with slow hesitant steps, watching with a careful eye the cup and saucer he held in one hand. The bright light from the service counter illuminated his soft, slightly thinning hair from behind and cast the illusion of a muted halo around his face. The general murmur of coffee shop talk floated around him, and then was drowned out by the punishing scream of the espresso maker. His face twitched slightly in response to the metallic screech and he stopped only momentarily to make sure he hadn't spilled anything. When he reached the table where she sat, he gently set the tea down in front of her and put beside it a slice of almond biscotti he'd been carrying in his other hand. She looked at the tea and biscuit and wrapped her small hands around the cup to feel the heat seeping through. She leaned over and breathed in the hot, herbal vapor with a deep, appreciative smile. She looked up at him from behind the dark plastic frames of her glasses with the smile still in place upon her mouth, and he looked down at her with his lips taking a similar upward turn. Everything they had shared in the last thirty years passed between them with that familiar look and she said, "Thank you, dear."

John Crawford

Right on Red:

Bruce Springsteen, Neil Diamond and Southern Ruminations

From *One Last Rambling Road Trip*

I got to make it to Memphis. I got to make it to Memphis.

Lingering over my coffee, in a Waffle House somewhere in the middle of Tennessee, I'm just postponing the inevitable. It's almost 10 p.m. I've had a long day, but to keep on schedule for my road trip, I need to drive another three hours or so to Memphis.

The Waffle House is located right off the highway, surrounded by the hustle and bustle usually found off the interstate: truck stops, gas stations, chain restaurants, cheap motels. The place is full of men wearing cut-off tee shirts and baseball caps. The grills are fired up in front of me, and the waitresses walk around with "WH" visors.

I feel a little out of place. As a Yankee, my accent automatically gives me away here. I open my mouth, and it's instantly obvious that my home is somewhere far away, somewhere that fought on the other side in the Civil War.

A second waffle sits unfinished on my plate. "Those double waffles will get you every time," the waitress says, taking away my plate.

I sip some coffee. My stomach is full. My mind is, too. I think about the night and the drive ahead. I think about my fiancée, who I just called from a gas station pay phone.

And I think of the future and what's coming down the road.

I got to make it to Memphis.

A long drive has three phases. At first, you're excited about traveling and seeing places you've never seen before. You blast music, wind down the window, and watch the world pass by.

Eventually, though, you grow tired. You feel every minute and every mile. Music even starts to get under your skin. You shut it off and ride in silence. It's just you, the road and your thoughts.

But after a while, you enter another place. You're calm and your mind clears. This is the third phase. You don't mind the drive so much anymore. You're in the zone, into the Zen of driving. When you hit this place, an hour can go by, and you don't even realize it. You can go on forever. You don't want to stop.

When you drive long distances, this is where you want to be. You want to reach this place in your head.

Leaving the Waffle House, I make it to Memphis, and then some, finally stopping in Mississippi. It's 1 or 2 a.m., but there's to be no rest tomorrow. I'm on a road trip, and there are more places to go, more things to see.

This was the plan: rent a car, drive through the south, and do it as cheaply as possible.

I figured it was a good time to take a trip, for I was at a crossroads. Big changes were upon me. I had just quit the stability of my 9-5 job to take the exciting yet extremely scary leap into full-time freelance writing. To save money, I moved back with my parents. I was also getting married in a year, at which point I would be leaving my Philadelphia home to go to New England, where my fiancée was originally from and where she wanted to return.

To top it off, in a few weeks, I was turning 30.

All this change is hard, but ultimately, I think it's good to shake up your life once in a while. It's too easy to get comfortable and coast along.

My last day at work is when I start my trip. I walk through the doors for the last time, get in my car, and go. I would be away for three weeks, and it's to be a down-and-dirty trek. I would eat cheaply and stay in hostels, crappy motels and friends' places.

It is also to be a solo trip. My fiancée couldn't take time off from law school, and none of my friends have the money or inclination to go roaming around the south.

Most of the time, I don't feel lonely on the trip. Maybe I'm too busy, too wrapped up in my own head, to feel alone. But there are times, like looking at the Smoky Mountains, or hearing country bands in Nashville, that I wish she, or somebody, anybody, was there to share in the moment.

The trip starts in a time of uncertainty. Hurricane Rita, the sequel to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, is rumbling towards the Gulf. Gas prices are already high, and the storm is threatening to raise them even higher, or knock out the nation's gas supply altogether.

I head west, then south. I see Mammoth Cave in Kentucky, then Nashville and the Jack Daniel's Distillery in Tennessee. Then it's onto Clarksdale, Oxford and Tupelo, Miss., then Birmingham, Ala., then up to the Great Smoky Mountains, then somewhere else, and another place after that.

Everyone thinks I'm crazy for doing all this driving. Everyone asks if I've got this out of my system yet, and I don't know if I have an answer to that. Plagued with a bit of wanderlust, I feel most alive when I'm traveling. It takes you out of your routine, out of your normal self.

My family worries about me. In one phone conversation, as I sit in bed in a cheap motel, my dad tells me he'll be glad when I'm safe and sound back at home.

It's hard work traveling. You're always thinking about where you need to go next and how you're going to get there. So when doing a road trip, there are certain rules you need to follow.

Firstly, you must be willing to do a lot of driving. You may be tired, but in order to see things in other places, you got to suck it up and press on.

You have to be willing to go with the flow, to not always be certain where you'll spend the night. You can't be too proud to get down and dirty, and that means you must be willing to wear the same clothes two days in a row, maybe three. You must be willing to take a nap in the backseat of your car. You must be willing to eat a cheap lunch of peanut butter and crackers if time and/or money is lacking. You must be willing to eat a Pop-Tart for breakfast, even if you can't toast it, even if you're eating it out of its wrapper as you roll down the road.

And if you have a fiancée, one kind enough to not say one negative word about your road trip, or you quitting your job to chase your dreams, then you better keep the lines of communication open. Call her every night.

I call my fiancée from motel rooms. I call her standing in parking lots. We talk about her day, about my day and what I saw, and about our future plans. We say we love each other, then hang up, our conversation done until the next night, when I'm in a new town in a new state.

Talking to the ones you love back home is essential, but it can be hard to cross the miles. In a Motel 6 in Georgia, right outside my window, a man on a cell phone has it out with his girlfriend.

"What you say and what you do doesn't match," he says. It's 1 a.m., and he's cursing and talking rather loud, as if yelling will better bridge the distance between them.

I should be angry that he's keeping me awake, but at first, I can't help but listen. I'm fascinated. It's not everyday that you're privy to such an extremely private conversation.

"Have I said anything about breaking up with you? I don't want to break up with you, but there are things we need to talk about."

She brings up his past mistakes, and he tells her to stop throwing things at him. He denies sleeping with her friend. Then he says her friends are filling her head with lies.

Finally, I pull my curtains open, letting him know I'm awake and can hear him. He moves on, his voice fading into the night.

After the Smoky Mountains, I head out to the coast, to Charleston S.C. and Savannah, Ga., then St. Augustine and Gainesville in Florida.

Driving through Florida, I crank "Born to Run." Having driven thousands of miles on the trip, the song took on a new meaning. Here I was, on a highway far from home, listening to a song that described, at least in a little way, how I was feeling and what I was doing. For the moment, I indeed felt "born to run."

In the first half of his career, Bruce Springsteen sang about the road and escape constantly. His songs were littered with cars, as much a part of the landscape as horses in a Western.

But Springsteen stopped writing about the road after a while. He settled down, and he wrote less about highways and more about homes and the things that happen inside them, which makes sense. You can't be born to run forever. Sooner or later, you got to park the car.

I think about Neil Diamond, too, and his song "I Am...I Said." It's typical overblown Neil Diamond, but cut through the song's bombast and get to its meat and bones, and it's about this guy caught between two coasts, about being in too many places without any of them being a home.

I can relate. With my life so full of changes, of having just moved back home and soon to be married and moving again, the song gets at something painfully real, at least for me.

Of course, Neil Diamond isn't the best driving music. He isn't like Springsteen and Chuck Berry and the Beach Boys. Those guys are all good for a long drive. They sing about turnpikes and highways, about Cadillacs and deuce coupes, about getting around and having no particular place to go.

The Bend

Sometimes twangy stuff, songs that truck drivers would like, felt right behind the wheel, too. But it's got to be the right level of twang. Too much twang, and I'm changing the channel. I don't want to overdose on it.

Neil Diamond doesn't have twang or soul or much of anything. His records don't make you want to hop in a car, and they don't add anything when you're humming along the highway either. But "I Am...I Said," that song made me think.

After Florida, I drive across the gulf on I-10. I can tell I'm growing close to hurricane-damaged areas by the billboards. At first, they're torn. Then they're completely blank. Finally, there are no billboards at all, just poles sticking up.

I pull off the interstate in Biloxi. Trash is all over the streets. Buildings are damaged, and as you get closer to the water, the destruction is more intense. Trees are knocked down, homes are destroyed, lives wrecked.

But life goes on. Spray paint on a boarded-up window declares, "We survived." Clean-up crews are everywhere. Stores are open. It's a place taken to the breaking point of civilization and now slowly crawling back.

During my trip, I visit several of my friends. I knew them all as single men having successes and failures with women. Now, they're all married: John with Kristin in Ohio, Dima with Becca in Florida, Blake with Elena in Louisiana. In the beginning of my trip, before heading to the south, I even attend the wedding reception of Bob and Audrey in Ann Arbor, Mich.

They've all made homes for themselves, and they all seem so much older, more grown up, more together. I'm just amazed by the fact that I don't have to sleep on any couches. Everyone had an extra bed for me, or at least a futon.

John, for one, seems content. I tell him of the adventures I had and will be having, and he politely listens. He finds it interesting, but he doesn't long to be on the road with me. King of his suburban castle, he seems fine with simply sitting on the couch and watching football, toys on the floor around him.

At times on the trip, I long to just settle on a couch somewhere. After a while, all the traveling wears you out. All the sites you see, it's too much to digest and take in. At some point, you just want to stop, settle down, and be at home.

I think of quiet times with my fiancée, just lazy Sunday mornings, finishing off breakfast, listening to NPR, and lingering over coffee.

In Baton Rouge, La., a city swelling with hurricane refugees hoping to make a new home, I visit Blake, or as he's sometimes known, The Wanderer. Like me, he's got the wanderlust. He's not afraid to ramble, to go with the flow and see where the wind takes him, so he understands more than most my need to get on the road, to see things, to experience things. We both collect adventures and stories from our travels, then swap them with each other like baseball cards.

The Wanderer asks me what travel plans I have for the future. I say this could be it. Sure, my

The Bend

fiancée and I will do a honeymoon, but if and when kids come, traveling will have to be put on hold for a while. And the type of down-and-dirty road trip I'm doing now, where you drift along from cheap motel to cheap motel, will be a thing of my past.

He doesn't really say anything to this, the reality that my time as a fellow wanderer is ending. It's a fact of life. He just got married himself, so his wandering days may soon be over, too.

I keep moving. I drive on, up through Louisiana, up to Arkansas. I stop in Hope, then Little Rock.

Along the way, I think of Mike, this poet I knew back in my idealistic grad school days at ND. Mike had a saying: "right on red." When the day came that he left the Bend for his beloved North Carolina home, he was going "right on red." He wasn't even waiting for the light to change to green.

I haven't seen Mike since I graduated, but me and other friends took up the saying. If you were moving on, if you were trying on new adventures, you went right on red.

I went right on red after quitting work. I hit the road and went right on red into my new life as a freelancer and all the big changes that were coming at me.

Throughout my trip, I see and hear and taste many things. There are the confederate flags and the Civil War monuments, the sweet tea and barbecue plates, the blues and country music, the cotton fields and sites of courage from the Civil Rights Movement. Reminders of religion follow me everywhere, from huge crosses towering into the air, to billboards preaching about salvation and abortion, to radio stations talking of evolution, culture wars and being reborn. In one motel, I enter my room to find a Bible open on the bed to a passage from Job.

After nearly three weeks of all this, though, it's time to go back. You can't stay on the road forever. I point the car towards home.

I've got many miles to go, but that's OK. I clear my head, enter that Zen-like space. The road is long, but it doesn't matter. I'm going right on red. I'm feeling all right.

Kevin Ducey

She named the baby Don Juan

In the poetry section
of the big-box bookstore
on the asphalt riverine system
of the Northern Indiana
autoshed, someone's abandoned
three books on the
'B' shelf: after Baraka,
Blake, Byron, we have
Sex for Dummies by Dr. Ruth;
and the The Sex-
Starved Marriage; followed by
35,000 Baby Names. Evidence
of trauma, another crash site of
the Puritans. Critical theory
would argue that none of
these books is out of place –
or that they all are. Setting aside
the question, 'should dummies
have sex?' – we should note
that someone looking for a
baby name can't be entirely sex-
starved (though you'd have to
ask Dr. Ruth). I'd like to think
these books were left
in the poetry section when
the shopper discovered
the answer to her dilemma
in Shelley. She'd spent an hour
making her selections: "hmm,
I'm pregnant, but I don't know how –
and my husband and I hate sex."
But then she paused for
a moment in Poetry. Fate is

rough trade: the orange
Penguin Byron catches her
eye and she never looks back. Sex
with dummies has never
been better and seven months
later, somewhere in Missolonghi,
a Childe Harold is born.

Whiteness of a whale

Trident Cafe, Boulder, Colorado

The volatile tectonics of the housing mkt
overwhelm even the otherworldly
reserve of the geologists
who so love the place.

California

The heart's trigger finger
loses its itch. Under the course
of the sun, sweetheart,
the road, and we,
enter and leave by the same simple points
on opposite horizons.

The credits roll across the
ending: the saga
of the long-delayed appearance
of the surrealist to come along
and pry open
all those little clams of desire.

The
unconscious: the last great hold-out
market. Vast as China.
There, in Hollywood,
the pistoleros are finally exfoliated
by the more militant poltergeists:

“It’s a ruse, Captain, and if you don’t
cover up that shiny brass buckle,
you’ll bring every ’pache
in the country down on our heads.”

The Captain looks up to the sky,
lost and homesick.
“The sky is fixed in stone,” he says,
“a silence I cannot enter.”

“Yeah, I hear that,” the scout
answers, “it’ll get knotted up like that
whenever you get yourself surrounded.”

Cyndy Searfoss

Airs Above Ground

LeeAnn watched as the small plane rolled up to the terminal, its metallic skin shimmering in the heat of the late July Louisville sun. Compared to the jumbo jet at the next gate, it looked too small to hold more than a flight crew and some mail. She tried to remember if the last air disaster she had read about involved a large or small plane. It must have been a small plane, a commuter plane that had crashed just after taking off in Alabama, killing twelve passengers and three crew members. The details of crashes stayed with her long after the newspapers have been taken out for recycling. Somehow she felt safer knowing that the last crash was small plane. She tracks these mishaps in her head like a macabre air traffic controller whose job starts after the damage is done, she thinks. LeeAnn has somehow arrived at the irrational conclusion that these incidents typically come in threes, usually within ten days of each other, and alternate between large and small planes - a 747 here, a Cessna there.

“LeeAnn, you have a tabloid mentality when it comes to that stuff,” Greg had said the last time she pulled the paper away from him to read the front-page story of the crash. LeeAnn hasn’t told him about her theories. He is a mechanical engineer and she knows he would much rather believe in “hydraulic system failure” or “pilot error,” than random chance.

Once she’s in the air, LeeAnn rarely thinks of the possibility of disaster. It’s the sound of the engines straining to lift the plane off the ground and the vibrations that make her break into a cold sweat. On her first long flight, a trip to Austria as a teenager, the pilot aborted the take-off in New York, slamming on the brakes at the end of the runway. The plane had tilted heavily to the left and shook so hard LeeAnn’s teeth rattled. The flight attendant later told LeeAnn and her parents that a hydraulic pressure warning light had come on just as they were about to ascend. LeeAnn remembers the attendant’s (but they were called stewardesses back then, she thinks) pat answer and her annoyance at the woman’s serene voice - a stark contrast to her own pounding heart. Watching the ground blur under the plane still unnerves her, but if she’s going to crash, she wants to know; to be able to form one final thought or prayer or wish. She doesn’t want to die unaware.

The remembrance of that flight makes her think of the rest of the trip - something that hadn’t crossed her mind in years. They had spent a week in Vienna, staying at the Imperial, one of the city’s oldest hotels, one with damask bed covers as warm and heavy as small mattresses. LeeAnn had felt like a baby again, sleeping swaddled and safe, but even the security of the duvet cocoon hadn’t been able to erase her sensation of coming close to death.

The only person she has told her macabre ideas about flying to is her next door neighbor, Sheila.

“You know, if you flew more often, you wouldn’t dwell on the possibilities,” Sheila told her once. “Greg would take you anytime you wanted to go with him,” she continued. LeeAnn felt vaguely annoyed. Sheila’s eighteen hours of psychology were usually directed at her husband, not her friends.

“Think of it this way – you could get over your flying phobia and get laid in some of the country’s finest Holiday Inns.” Sheila’s husband left her 18 months ago for a young, blonde sales rep in his company. Sheila had found receipts for “king-sized bed, double occupancy” at Holiday Inns in his travel expenses and knew the blonde upping the occupancy on his trips.

When Sheila was still in shock over Bob’s departure, she had told LeeAnn in a frozen voice, “The only thing I’ve done for the last 10 years is make sure Bob’s life ran like clockwork. I mean everything. I took his shirts to the cleaner’s, made sure the oil got changed on schedule, the works. We even had sex according to his DayTimer. I had to write a note in morning so he’d make sure he got home before midnight.”

Sheila and LeeAnn had sat in Sheila’s kitchen, watching the rain streak down the windows which, like all of Sheila’s possessions, are nearly spotless. LeeAnn always feels she needs to tuck her shirt in and straighten her hair when she’s around Sheila. They had been weeding flower beds and chatting through the fence when the rain began. LeeAnn noticed that Sheila has a tiny smudge of dirt along the hem of her white pants. Only Sheila would do yard work in white pants, she thought.

“And I can’t even tell you how many times I hosted dinner parties for hordes of people I couldn’t stand, just because they were business associates. The whole fucking time, Bob said, ‘Just be patient. In a few years, I’ll have my own company and you won’t have to do this anymore,’” Sheila had laughed. “Damn, I hate to admit it, but he was right. He and Jennifer are starting their own business and I don’t have to cook for anyone anymore!”

There are young blondes in LeeAnn’s business, too. She’s seen them pass through the company only to become tired of the 18-hour days that occur every few months, like clockwork, usually because of a client emergency or just because Hugo, her boss, decides everyone needs “to be onboard around here.” Her boss is VP of public relations. LeeAnn is a public relations account supervisor. Her job is to make sure Hugo is content and that the agency’s major client, GreenCare, is frequently (and favorably) written up in trade and consumer publications.

A typical day begins and ends with placating Hugo, which usually means outlining the number of e-mails she’s sent, who she has spoken to and who she’ll be meeting with at trade shows.

“Good-morning, this is LeeAnn Statton,” she always speaks crisply on the phone and clearly - no chirping. In a world where “perception is reality,” as Hugo repeats endlessly, only underlings like secretaries and administrative assistants chirp. “I’d like to speak to Ray Johnson, please,”

“I’m sorry. Mr. Johnson is away from his desk at the moment. Would you like to leave a message on his voice mail?” The voice on the other end stops on an inquisitive note. Definitely an assistant, LeeAnn thinks, and feels sorry for her. This business is not kind to those in the lower ranks. Most of the editors she knows go through four or five assistants a year. One of them told LeeAnn he couldn’t understand “why a girl two or three years out of school thinks she should be making more than \$20,000 a year. It takes at least 18 months to get them broke in right. Before that, they make more work than they do.”

“Yes, please,” she replies. And so she speaks her piece into the magic electronic mailbox at the other end of the line, one of the 10 or 15 a day she usually leaves.

When she had started as an entry-level copywriter fresh from college, she actually sat across the

table from her clients. Now, business is conducted by voice mail, e-mail and the occasional fax. She's starting to feel old at 33. The two new employees under her gave her a blank look when she suggested typing envelopes after the printer broke down. Neither of them had used a "typewriter, you know, the kind with a ribbon" before.

There is a plus to working electronically, though. She no longer spends hundreds of dollars a year on a "business wardrobe." The only time she puts on anything more dressy than slacks for work is for her twice-monthly, in-person meetings with GreenCare - then, and for new business calls. The money she has saved on clothes paid for an antique hutch in the dining room.

The voice of the flight attendant announcing the arrival of another flight interrupts her thoughts, startling her. She glances at her watch, trying to remember Greg's schedule. She decides he's probably in the air over Georgia right now, sucking down gin and tonics and reviewing the agenda for the tomorrow's meeting.

At the few parties she and Greg have the time to attend these days, he and his friends compare notes on hotels, restaurants and car rental agencies; they joke about the length of their credit card statements at the end of the month and the thickness of their expense reports. Greg never participates when talk turns, as it frequently does, to the ways and means of cheating on expenses - lying about the size of the tip on the dinner bill, taking friends out to eat and turning the bill in as a business dinner. Instead, he goes to the bar or kitchen for a drink, asking her in passing if she'd like another one. By now, she can choreograph their movements. They are the same no matter whose house, whose party, what season of the year. She usually goes with him, having been simultaneously bored and disconcerted by the talk of finding, keeping and paying for reliable daycare, although that has changed. After what seems like centuries of weighing the pros and cons, she and Greg have decided to stop using her diaphragm and see what happens.

They had made the decision over Saturday breakfast a month ago. The night before, they had had dinner at the house of friends who had two little boys, both under four. At some point in the evening, they had glanced at each other. It was one of those moments they sometimes have, when all the pieces seem to fit together. The next morning after the dishes were rinsed and put in the dishwasher Greg had grabbed her by the hand and dragged her up to the bathroom. Then he went to the bathroom closet and took out the cosmetic bag that held the diaphragm and jelly. He held it up to his face and blew it a kiss. "So long, farewell, it's time to say goodnight," he sang and dropped the bag in the trash.

It's still their secret, though. LeeAnn hates playing the pregnant game, the smiling and the non-committal answers that go with the questions and comments of their families.

"Aren't you pregnant yet? I got pregnant the first time we did it without condoms. I tell you, it took all the fun out of it," That would be LeeAnn's older sister, who now has four children under the age of ten.

"Gee, you've been married five years, and you still aren't pregnant? Don't you think you and Greg should come in and get tested? I can make an appointment for next month for fertility tests. If there's a problem, you really should get it taken care of now. You guys aren't getting any younger, you know." That would be Greg's sister, an RN at LeeAnn's OB-GYN's office.

“I’ll be so glad when you two start a family. You’ll make wonderful parents. I can’t wait to get my hands on another little one,” the voice of LeeAnn’s mother says.

Somehow, all her thoughts about family circle back to LeeAnn’s mother. LeeAnn is afraid she’ll never match up to her own expectations of what a mother should be, and knows if she ever told her mother this, she would laugh. In Vienna, she and her mother had toured opera houses and eaten tortes and ices while walking through immaculate streets and parks. It was one of the few peaceful times she can remember through her adolescence. Most of the time she felt that she and her parents were like the feral cats that lived at the end of their street, warily circling each other, occasionally breaking into hostilities but mostly posturing.

During that interlude, her father had spent his days in meetings discussing how his company’s tooling machines could be exported into Austria and sold to manufacturing firms. He would come back to the motel every evening, tie still knotted tightly. Unlike his disheveled arrivals after the 45-minute commute from his office in the States, he still looked pressed and immaculate at the end of the day.

While her father worked, she and her mother had explored the city. The main reason she’d come was to see the Spanish Riding School in Vienna. Like many of her friends, LeeAnn had been in love with the idea of horses, enchanted with their strength and beauty. “We’re really proud of how well you’ve done in school this year, honey,” her father had told her after she’d presented him with her final report card filled with A’s. “You deserve a special treat for working so hard, so we want to take you with us when we go to Vienna this summer,” he had smiled, sure she would be pleased to be included. Actually, she had hoped to spend the week they were gone at the lake with a group of friends, but something in her father’s eyes, a clouded deflection of her possible refusal, had made her nod her head and smile. And there were the horses.

“Sure, Dad, that will be great.”

“We want to make sure you get to see those white horses, you know, what are they called?”

“Lippizaners, Dad, they’re called Lippizaners.”

“Well, I made sure the company travel agent got instructions to get us tickets or whatever they call them over there so you could see them.”

LeeAnn walked over the father and kissed him on the forehead. She was almost his height now, just two inches short of his 5’11”. “That’ll be great, Daddy. Thanks a lot.”

As the aircraft comes up under the windows overlooking the runways, the other passengers begin to stir, mostly business travelers folding up their papers and packing their work back into their briefcases. A group of teenagers sitting on their backpacks get to their feet, helping pull each other up. LeeAnn sighs and sticks the gum wrapper she has been twisting through her fingers into Power Equipment Dealer to mark her place. The article wasn’t very interesting but finishing it will give her something to do on the flight home. She knows Dave, the marketing director at GreenCare, will be asking what she thinks about the effect it may have on their fall marketing program.

The crowd begins inching toward the gate and the speakers in the boarding area come to life again. Watching the attendant behind the counter, LeeAnn notices the woman’s voice comes out of the speakers slightly after her lips begin to move.

“Flight 45 from St. Louis is debarking at Gate Seven. Flight 45 from St. Louis is debarking at Gate Seven. Flight 108 to Cincinnati will begin boarding at Gate Seven in five minutes. Flight 108, destination Cincinnati, will begin boarding at Gate Seven in five minutes.”

LeeAnn stows her magazine in her bag and stands up, pulling the sweaty section of her cotton blouse off her back. Her shorts are sticking to the backs of her thighs, too. She glances around the boarding area, trying to decide if she can get away with peeling them away from her legs. The number of men in the vicinity discourages her from more than a quick flick, which fails to loosen them. Even an hour in the frigid air of the Louisville airport hasn't been long enough to cool her off after a morning spent touring the 25 acres of outdoor booths and demonstration areas at the trade show. Carrying her duffel bag and garment bag from the booth inside the convention center to the bus stop hadn't helped either. Her arms still ache. She had laughed, perhaps a little too heartily she thinks, when one of the GreenCare district reps joked about how heavy her duffel bag was as he strained to move it further under the booth's counter. “Shit, LeeAnn, this weighs a ton. How many pairs of shoes you got in here?”

Thank goodness the outdoor power equipment industry is fairly casual, she thinks. There is no way she could have made the rounds in a suit and high heels and then carried everything to the bus stop. She would have driven one of the heels through her chest first.

Her morning had been spent scouting the competition for GreenCare, blending in with the crowd of dealers examining the next year's models of mowers, riding tractors and chipper/shredders. “Environmental equipment is still on the rise,” she wrote in the small notebook she had picked up at another booth. Freebies are always popular; GreenCare is giving away baseball caps and literature bags. Last year she had taken an unofficial poll of dealers that stopped by the GreenCare indoor booth to see what sort of things they were likely to pick up and keep. Based on their responses, she'd proposed sports bottles. Dave wanted caps.

She had saved the outdoor rounds for the last day, knowing from last year's experience she would want to escape from the GreenCare guys after eating, drinking and talking with them 18 hours a day for the first two days. It's not that they aren't nice guys; it's just that all they talk about is tractors and the women at the next table ... how attractive (or unattractive) they are.

Dave had rented a minivan to save on cab fare (as well as mileage allowances for his reps and her expenses, LeeAnn was sure), so she even rode to and from the convention center with the GreenCare group. That meant they arrived at the hotel dining room at about the same time – 6:00 a.m. – and had breakfast together. LeeAnn is not a morning person. That Dave wanted intelligent answers to his questions at breakfast was almost unbearable. In the past, she was nervous enough about her ability to handle all her duties to be hyper-alert, even in the morning. This was her third trip and the routine was as boring as the jokes she's heard over and over from the reps.

“Hey, LeeAnn, if good girls go to heaven and bad girls go to hell, where do hookers go?”

“I don't know,” she told Troy, whose last name she never can remember.

“To the Virgin Islands to be recycled,” he laughed.

That was two years ago; last year he repeated it at dinner. This year she heard it while they were polishing the tractors at the inside booth. She turned her back and grimaced.

On the first morning this year, she had sat by herself, reading the show's daily newspaper at a table in the back of the restaurant when Dave came in.

"Morning," he said as he sat down across from her.

"Um, hi, Dave," she tried to think of a reasonably coherent statement about the coming day, and failed.

"So, how many interviews do you have set up today," he asked.

She had pulled out her Palm Pilot and checked her schedule.

"I'm meeting with Tracy from *OPE* first thing. She's coming by the booth as soon as she gets in. Then, I have a 9 a.m. with *Organic Gardening* and I'm meeting with John from *Horticulture* for lunch at 12:30. A couple of other people are stopping by to pick up press kits. I've labeled them and put them in my rack at the booth in case I'm out when they come by," LeeAnn replied as she ran through her appointments. She knew Dave got bored with details quickly. As long as it looked like she was on top of things, he would let her do things her way.

"Sounds good. Just make sure you leave directions with the guys about the press kits. It would probably be best if you can make sure you're around when these people come by, but if you can't, let one of the guys know what they're supposed to do with them."

After breakfast, LeeAnn had crammed into Dave's rented minivan with six or seven of the reps.

"Here, honey, you get the seat of honor up front with Dave," Ralph opened the door for her and helped her into the front seat, giving her arm an extra-friendly squeeze before he climbed in the back.

LeeAnn made her way to the back of the line to board, preferring to wait in the building rather than on the plane as the passengers are sorted and situated. As she passes the counter, a thump in the small of her back sends her lurching. "I'm sorry," she apologizes to the man who bumped her, thinking maybe it was her fault. She turns to stare into the side of a large brown box framed by two pudgy hands.

The hands and box are lowered and a man looks over the top at her. "Sorry," he mutters in her direction and gives her a glance. In the brief moment their eyes meet, LeeAnn looks at herself through his eyes. Messy hair escaping from the ponytail she had hairsprayed into place that morning, windburned skin, lipstick wandering off the top of her upper lip. Not the type of woman men admire with a smile. He turned to speak with the flight attendant behind the counter.

The line had stopped moving and the man's voice was loud enough to cause those at the front of the line to glance back at him. She shifted her duffel bag from her right shoulder to her left and pushed it back over her hip to create a barrier between her and the man with the box.

"I talked to someone here this morning about this package. It's delicate. I can't have it put in the cargo area, assuming this plane even has one. I was told I could carry it on," the man's sentences were short and clipped as if he expected some sort of difficulty.

"Let's take a look at it, sir," the flight attendant said. "If it's small enough to fit under the seat, there's no problem. You can carry it on and stow it under the seat during the flight. If it's too big, we'll have to take a look at some alternatives. May I have the package, please?"

LeeAnn could feel the moving air currents created by the box moving behind her. She wondered

how heavy it is. After a few moments, the flight attendant spoke again.

“I’m sorry, sir. This is two inches too tall. The seat clearance is 16 inches and as you can see, this is 18 inches. Now we do have a cargo area, if you’d like to check it through.”

“I don’t think you understood me. This box contains a \$6,000 CAD prototype. If it’s damaged, I will lose a \$300,000 contract. I will carry it on the plane with me.”

The attendant sighed, but softly. LeeAnn wondered how many of these problems she has to deal with a day. The attendant was probably ready to send the guy flying all right, LeeAnn thought, right out the window, CAD package following him down.

“In that case, you will have to buy another ticket. The box will have to be strapped into a seat for the duration of the flight. I have one seat left on this flight. If you want to keep the package with you, I suggest you purchase it now since this flight often goes on stand-by.” LeeAnn noticed the attendant’s voice had become almost as short and clipped as the man’s.

She wished the line would start moving. She’s tired and just being close to the confrontation drains her. Greg tells her she lets Tim and Dave bully her because she’s afraid to stand up for herself. LeeAnn knows that’s not the case. She would rather save her energy for the fights that counts - for the big things. She has learned that having the reputation of a pacifist often means when she does take issue with something, she’s listened to.

“You’re telling me I have to *pay* for this?” the man asked. “Do you make everyone pay for their carry-ons?”

“No sir. The only passengers who have to pay are those whose carry-ons require a seat we would normally sell to another passenger. As I said, if you want to take this package with you in the plane, you will have to purchase a seat.”

The line started to move forward again. At the door, she handed the flight attendant her boarding pass and snuck a look back at the counter. The man was talking to the other attendant behind the counter, gesturing and glaring. As she moved through the tunnel to the stairway, she could still hear his voice although the words are indistinguishable. She wondered if he was in town for the show.

Their last day in Vienna, LeeAnn and her parents went to the eighteenth-century hall that housed the horses. They toured the ornate barns, pausing at the stalls to look at any of the horses who came from the dark corners to peer at them through the bars. “These horses live better than we do” her father said. “Look at this wood! It’s got to be solid mahogany. I hope to God none of these creatures gets the urge to chew it.”

During the tour, the guide told them the history of the school and the breed in five languages. English was first.

“All the horses you see here are stallions.” He glanced at LeeAnn’s father, “And, sir, none of them chew. They are given more than enough roughage to satisfy their tastes.” He went on to the whole group. “It is only because they are so well-trained that we are able to keep so many of them in such tight quarters,” the man spoke in a strangely unaccented voice. “You see, stallions are extremely territorial. It is part of their herd instinct. In the wild, a stallion must always be on guard, keeping predators from his band of mares and foals. Of course, here there are no predators, nor are there

any mares. They are kept at the stud farm with their young.”

The guide moved them past the last of the stalls, speaking now in French. LeeAnn tried to follow and found her three years of high school French wasn't up to the rapid pace of the guide's words. She wondered if he also spoke French without an accent. Bored, she walked over a wall displaying pictures of men in oddly flattened hats riding the white horses. After awhile, the guide began speaking in English again.

“The stallions you see here are the result of hundreds of years of selected breeding and training. Only a very small percentage of them make it into the advanced training we provide here. Many are weeded out as youngsters and sold as dressage horses or to lesser schools. The Spanish Riding School demands an exceptional amount of talent and perseverance from both its riders and stallions. You will see the results at the end of the tour during the performance.”

“Why don't you use females,” a woman at the back of the group asked.

The guide frowned, “I could answer that it is tradition, and that would be true, but there are reasons behind the tradition. Only the stallions have the fierceness, determination and drive needed to perform the most difficult movements. Mares are easily distracted and geldings are lazy. Because we are working with extremely powerful stallions, they must be dominated, not so much physically, but mentally in order to perform. Men are much better suited for this. And so, all our riders are men.”

The guide led them to the riding hall, asking them to please be seated and to remain quiet throughout the performance.

Inside the plane, LeeAnn was directed to her seat on the left side of the plane behind the wing, right next to the window. Behind the wing is good, she thought. She remembered Greg telling her this is the most stable part of any plane. It is the section least likely to break apart in a mishap. His travel agent has standing instructions to reserve a wing seat whenever possible. She found the nearest emergency exit is one row behind her.

Strapped in, bag stored under the seat in front of her, LeeAnn tried to finish the article. Just as she found the paragraph she last read, the man with the box, as she thought of him, came up to her.

“I need these two seats. You can sit up there,” he said pointing to the only empty seat in the 36-seat plane, four rows ahead on the other side.

LeeAnn was startled by the man and his demands. It took her a moment to think of a reply. In the meantime, the man began arranging the box on the seat and letting out the seat belt to secure it. He was puffing with exertion, beads of sweat gathered on the tip of his nose and then dropped onto the blue tweedy fabric of the seat.

“I'm sorry, but I specifically requested a wing seat,” she lied, surprised by how easy it was to come up with the deception.

The man looks up at her. “So?” he said and went back to buckling in the box.

LeeAnn felt the blood rising in her face. “So,” she said, louder than she anticipated. She was embarrassed by the stridency of her voice; other people stopped their preparations and conversations to look at her. “I'm not moving. I purchased this particular seat, and unless the *flight attendant* can give me a good reason for leaving it, I intend to stay in it until this plane lands in Cincinnati.”

He stopped his fiddling to look directly at her for the first time. “Look, lady, I don’t give a hairy rat’s ass if you purchased that seat or not. I need it and I’m going to ask you one more time to move. If you don’t, I’m going to have you moved.”

“Fine,” she said, “you do that.” She looked back down at the magazine, pretending to read. After a suitable interval, she turned the page. Out of the corner of her eye, she could tell he’s still standing there. She couldn’t make out his expression.

“Sir, you have to take your seat now so we can get underway,” the flight attendant came up the aisle, checking to see all the passengers are in belted in place, luggage stowed.

“I need that seat,” he said.

“But it’s not your seat,” LeeAnn replied.

“Sir, you have been assigned to seat D3. We can’t leave the gate until you are sitting there.”

“Bitch,” the man muttered under his breath, whether to her or the woman, LeeAnn was unable to determine. LeeAnn caught the flight attendant’s eye. They both smile. The box remained strapped to the seat beside LeeAnn.

The flight attendant went back to the front of the plane to make her welcome/safety spiel. LeeAnn pulled the plastic card from the pocket of the seat in front her and pretended to look at it.

As the plane left the ground, momentarily suspending itself between earth and clouds, LeeAnn again thought of the white stallions of Vienna. The man’s flat, dark eyes reminded her of their wide-eyed stares.

The sturdy, muscular white horses had paraded around the ring of the rococo building, first in group formation and then singly. The crystal chandeliers of the hall caught the sunlight streaming in from the massive windows and threw glitters down onto the black leather tack of the horses. She barely heard the announcer introducing the dressage movements they performed. It was if she, LeeAnn, ceased to exist. Only the muffled beat of hoofs hitting tanbark and the movement of long white limbs were real. At the end of the program, two pairs returned to the center of the arena. Their riders were unmounted, each holding his horse by two long lines. From a distance LeeAnn heard, “and now you will see performed the most difficult movements, the airs above ground. These horses are stallions, legendary for their fierceness in war, and these movements were used during battle to kill or maim the enemy. The most difficult and dangerous of these is the *capriole*,” In unison, the stallions crouched on their hind legs, gathering their hindquarters beneath them in a powerful arc of muscle. At the command of their riders, each jumped with front legs tucked. Their hind legs extended in one huge leap. For a moment, they seemed to pause in the air, as if daring gravity to pull them down.

Canvassing For A New City

The enamored hunters ride themselves down.

-Robert Duncan

Hoisted onto the winning horse, all other obstacles cleared.
We had no reason to doubt, alliances were maintained, an avenue of trees circa 1972,
Roy spitting at Ethel and the millennium.

As for reasons, love, none's better.

You shrugged mea culpa to make me smile.

It did come back: Master-of-the-House and that pretty girl swaying
as Streisand sang *Guava Jelly*.

When the pain hit, there was Liz in that white dress and the heat
and too much devotion sister-lady. There was whiskey and the guts to stick it out.
And that storm the south got.

2.

It remained to be seen.

Women scattered, showed up later wearing brothel-creeper shoes and mohair,
circled back with round collars, cropped hair, boyish.

But when your lips to her cheek exploded, water in a state of steam fal-lalled around the room.

On that clear night, Artemis rode through the birthplace of the world.

Steep fields, the backbone, the cleve where two lovers slept.

My youth begged one bear, one hound.

I took my loss.

Turned to tragedy, warriors carrying warriors home,

laid my trails and brush-nets in the narrows, cut my markers deep to remember.

Turned then to stony gardens, blood-sweat pared to water, hours.

In some such wood I hoped to find, I found an injured animal.

3.

You stay up late watching TV, I kiss your forehead for goodnight.

Ivanhoe sings 'my heart is all I am' to every castle window.

Then Munich, those faces, a species sees itself and cannot look away.

We draw, we swim in caves, of all the lists to start, why the failing?

There's Zagajewski's mint and cello, our ace-in-the-hole friendship.

But aging has made you nervous.

It's Vivienne Segal and show-tunes from here on out.

Little bird, don't fly yet.

I'm easily distracted by collapse and watch the evening news for implosion.

I've seen Madagascar bleeding its plume of red soil into the ocean.

I wonder what happens after.

That's how it goes.

Chris Gerben

Rumble Strips

If I were two or three years younger I'd write a poem tonight and not a journal entry. It would be called "Rumble Strips" and involve me driving up and down I-75 through narrowed lanes with traffic always behind me, insisting I speed up and over the limit. I might even consider placing some

n-n-n-n-nmmmm

n-n-n-nmmmm

breaks in-between to imitate the sound and in some ways the feel of the strips on a car south of Detroit. I'd be the summer back home going slower than usual while the ordinarily fast road is under construction, *Months of delay for years of relief* so the signs say. I'd be 45 in a usual 70. I'd be the car moving up and down, always circling back as if the answer in the destination was where I just was.

n-n-nmmmm

That might get silly, but it would imitate the sound and in some ways the feeling and my eyes would be getting tired. I'd be listening to Ani DiFranco's *Out of Range* on the way down, like when it was one of three albums I owned last summer and clung to when I rode from Harlem down the A to the L and then walked the four blocks home to the East Village. This time it would be mid-afternoon and the sun would be so unfamiliar. And I'd listen to a compilation of Bright Eyes—mostly the sad ones, this just the second of three albums owned—on the way back up after midnight. Sometimes it would be Dylan, a fuck-you screamed into the night, the odd optimism of "Queen Jane Approximately." Usually not.

n-nmmmm

I'd be worried about waking up the next day. I'd want to crawl beneath the mattress with Sylvia. I'd love my parents so much I'd avoid them. I'd want to be left alone, and be scared to be left alone. I'd know exactly what was wrong and exactly what could fix it. I'd be miserable always but feeling a bit better when driving and listening to the same songs on repeat, at some points singing stray lines.

nmmmm

I'd finally go home if only because I was tired and I had no other option. If I could I'd sleep in the car or on the side of the road. I'd wish the morning would never come and I'd take my seatbelt off blocks before I reached my house by curbside. The music would be so loud the next day. As usual I'd lose sight of my original metaphor until the last lines when I'd try to tie it back up and attempt being poignant or transparent. But then again that's only if I were two or three years younger. That's only if I were writing such a thing.

D.A. Sumrall

A white suit in Memphis

To stand in a place
quite dead, admire it
for its loss...
you've fallen into
forgetting what
you're doing mute
while placing fingertips
on merchandise.

Bullets are just
as strong as anything
you could recommend
with hands at bay.
Near the river there
is always some sort
of abandoned road,
littered and chapped,
and the scent of green,
the stench of life.

Beneath the dumb neon
sag of the same bored,
earnest chords the city
strikes a note of wanting;
everyone here is a guitar,
a love they've left behind,
a story they'll sing
to anyone at any given time.

When I left I left
wearing white to blind
the southern heat, hung
from the dash St. Christopher,
and I wore black once
on the road because
there is no way up a river.

Discretion

Public radio fills a private home
around a quiet occupant straining
to hear another mumble or moan or
hint of conversation from the room next
door, who rightly curses the fumbling of
those above dragging heavy stumps across
the ceiling/floor that thwarts our conjuror's
sole scene of lament, sex, or argument.

Dawn M. Comer

Under the Sign of Sleepytime

Editor’s Note: Few Tourist Attraction Trauma survivors are as honest and articulate about their experiences as Bud Blackenberry. Since its inclusion in *Tourist Attraction Travesty: Tales from Tourist Attraction Trauma Survivors*, “Under the Sign of Sleepytime” has helped hundreds of patients at the National Association of Tourist Attraction Survivors’ Research and Recovery Hospital grapple with their own pasts and tell their own stories.

When the National Association of Tourist Attraction Survivors found me, I was living alone in a one-bedroom apartment. In my anxiety and disaffection, I had lined the walls of each room with various “families” of Celestial Seasonings boxes—some empty, some in the process of being emptied. My bedroom was lined with Peppermint, Mint Magic, and Grandma’s Tummy Mint; my kitchen, with Red Zinger, Lemon Zinger, Wild Berry Zinger, and Raspberry Zinger; my bathroom, with Bengal Spice, Cinnamon Apple Spice, and Mandarin Orange Spice. And though I was in my own home, I never truly felt at home, for Celestial Seasonings was always discontinuing old teas (how I missed Waikiwi Peach!) and churning out new ones, keeping my life from being complete, keeping me from being at rest regardless of how restful I believed a life filled with herb teas must necessarily be.

The other tenants had complained to the landlady about the odor, and in hindsight, I suppose they had a right to. For though I kept the doors between rooms closed to minimize the mixing, the mixing was inevitable. To those living in the apartments above, below, and beside me, the mingled odors of Peppermint, Wild Berry Zinger, and Bengal Spice must have driven them mad. I, however, was oblivious.

To her credit, my landlady did not evict me right off. She knew that although I lived in Boston, I had been born and raised in Boulder, Colorado. And, having herself grown up in Wall Drug, she recognized the symptoms of Tourist Attraction Trauma and knew to keep a close watch on me. A little fact finding on her part, and she discovered that I, Bud Blackenberry, was Mo Siegel’s love child.

I was conceived during a Sunrise Break. My parents, full of sunshine and smokes, retreated to the coolness of the barn loft filled with drying peppermint. Herbal infusion at its best. And then, my mother told me, they fell asleep, because nights of packaging teas by hand were exhausting.

On May 26, 1971, I was born an unrefined bud, and so I was named. I would in my lifetime go through the same three stages herbs must go through before they are sold as Celestial Seasonings teas—Mill, Blend, and Package. But unlike a hopper of hibiscus, for me, those stages were not always so easy to identify.

I have some pleasant memories of my early childhood, my years before cutting, that early period of milling essential for maintaining freshness and flavor. For what could be better than to be raised in the birthplace of the Sleepytime Bear? In the early days, before production was beyond what Mo, my mother, and the merry band of herb packers could handle by hand, I tottered around the floor

of the building at 47th and Pearl, tied to my mother by a long length of hemp. And when I would tire of roaming, I, like a tether ball that wraps itself round and round a pole, would circle round and round my mother until I had wrapped her up tight in hemp and she would have no choice but to be still and let me hold her until I decided it was time to unwind again.

The outside world never smelled as good as where my mother spent her days sewing tea bags with her sleek silver Singer, a gift from my father. Some days, the odor of blackberry leaves permeated the building; other days, hibiscus dust coated everything, including me, pink. But on any given day, my favorite place to go, my favorite place to be, was a room that never changed and was always kept closed—the Mint Room. Walking into the Mint Room, my eyes would burn and my lungs would fill with a cool fire. This was as close as I could get to the moment of my conception, the womb before my birth. I have always imagined that when my mother's water broke, it was not some bland amniotic fluid that went spilling over her kitchen's tiled floor, but peppermint tea. Gallons and gallons of steaming hot peppermint tea.

My first memory of my mother is of her thick black hair that smelled of blackberry oil. When I cried, she picked me up and held me to her, and I soon calmed down when I buried my face in that forest of hair. She was the most beautiful woman in the world with a face both strong and soft, and broad hips which my father called his rose hips.

Yes, I knew my father, and I loved him too—at least, in the early years when he was all about those things he said everyone should be all about: love, peace, equality, living off the land, using herbs of all kinds for a healthier life. But by the time I was two, he was traveling a lot, going all over the world to buy his herbs instead of picking them himself in the Colorado countryside. And by the time I was three, my father had made his first million and had his own office eight blocks away.

I guess you could say money didn't blend well with Mo, Mom, and me. The Blendmaster did something wrong there. Maybe the proportions were off. Maybe there should have been a trial run before it was put out on the market. But there wasn't. And the "Mo, Mom, Money, and Me" line was a flop. Too many Ms, perhaps. "Mo, Mom, and Me" had worked just fine, after all. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

At Celestial Seasonings, the Blendmaster is the person who dresses up all scientific in a white lab coat and spends the day putting bits of different herbs into clear glass beakers, pouring boiling water over them, swishing them around for four to six minutes, and tasting the results. Of everybody at Celestial Seasonings, the Blendmaster wields the greatest power in determining the product line. When I was growing up, the Blendmaster's name was Bob.

Now, things went wrong for Bob the Blendmaster all the time. He tried all kinds of crazy combinations like his infamous Pep-o-Nilla-Scus (peppermint, vanilla, and hibiscus) and Cozy Creosote (Sleepytime's lesser cousin), but fortunately, most of these never made it to market. One notable exception was Nutcracker Sweet, released in 1995 as a tribute to Bob the Blendmaster who gagged and died while tasting it.

Whatever the reason, Mo, Mom, Money, and Me was a bad blend. The profits from Mo's 36 helped my father buy a little house for Mom and me. But then, when profits really kicked in, it was like the Blendmaster said to himself, "A little money tastes pretty good in here, a whole lot must be

even better.” But the Blendmaster was wrong and a pretty good blend was spoiled. Instead of money helping to bind us all together, it pulled Mo out, taking the money with him.

But it wasn't just the money. My father was selling out in other small ways. As he started hiring more people, he started changing who he was to be more accessible, even though that meant giving up his ideals, including his vegetarian ideals. I still remember going to a company picnic when I was six years old and my father serving hot dogs and hamburgers for the very first time, even eating them himself and laughing at my mother who stuck to her soy and sprouts. My father offered me a hot dog with ketchup, and I, trusting him, took it. I had taken just one bite when my mother grabbed me up and made me spit out the bite of half-chewed hot dog into her hand. She squirted fresh water into my mouth, made me rinse and spit, rinse and spit, until all the meat was out while my father stood with his big corporate buddies watching me, laughing between bites of burgers.

“Really, Mo,” I remember Mom scolding, “can't you leave just one thing uncorrupted? If you want to sell out, sell out. Eat hot dogs for all I care, but can't you at least leave our son out of it? Let him decide what he wants to do, who he wants to be.”

And there I stood, ketchup down the front of my shirt, Mom moving for the bean sprout and tofu salad she'd made. Had my father not turned away, not looked ashamed of himself, not shooed me towards my mother, perhaps I would have protested, gone back to ask for another hot dog, maybe even a hamburger, but I didn't. Everything pointed to my mother being more right, more pure, more committed; she was, after all, the one who took care of me day after day after day.

Since I've always liked the simple varieties best—Peppermint, Chamomile, Sleepytime—Mom and Me seemed like a pretty good blend. After that company picnic, she never said or did anything to turn me against my father and I continued to visit the factory my father was building, though I seldom came into contact with him. When I did, he just said, “Mind your mother, now. She's a good enough woman,” and gave me new teas to try. I even had a special pass into the Mint Room where I would go after school to unwind. My classmates played baseball, rode bikes, or traded baseball cards, but I preferred solitude, the absence of chatter, and the palpable odor of mint.

You know how there's always that one kid in school everybody wants to avoid? The kid who smells funny? That was me. Most days I smelled like peppermint, but some days, after lounging on a fresh cutting of spearmint, I took on a sickly sweet smell. Add Celestial Seasonings' Mountain Herbery shampoo and my mother's campaign against anti-perspirant (she said it would clog my pores and I would die for lack of oxygen) and I must have smelled just awful. I knew I was different, that I smelled different and liked different things. Even so, I was friendly to everyone, even if they weren't always friendly back to me.

I remember third grade especially well, for I had high hopes that year. Even though I was having a particularly rough time, I decided I could make things change on Valentine's Day. For Valentine's Day I used fine netting to make sachets of herbs and spices (Bob the Blendmaster helped me) for my classmates that they could turn into an original cup of tea. And let me tell you, it's difficult to come up with twenty-five never-before-been-tasted tea blends! For two weeks before the Valentine's party, I spent my afternoons with Bob the Blendmaster, blending and tasting, getting myself so full of tea that I couldn't help but wet the bed every single night. And it wasn't like I was a chronic bed

wetter who couldn't help himself. Under normal circumstances, I had great bladder control, but with so much tea inside of me, I couldn't help it.

Mom went with me to a fabric store and helped me pick out fine netting, the type used to make birdseed pouches for weddings. The night before the Valentine's Day party, I finished my twenty-fifth blend and stayed up all night tying my little sachets of tea and creating names for each to go with my classmates' names. I still remember some of them: Sweet Sue Spice; Zany Zed Zinger; Minty Matthew; Hibiscus Hugh; Won't You be My Lemon, Linda; Because I Clove You, Clara.

I was so excited on Valentine's Day morning! I left the house with a red heart-shaped basket full of individually wrapped and labeled tea sachets and, oh, what high hopes I had! Mom, with tears in her eyes, hugged and kissed me and said, "I'm so proud of you, Bud Blackenberry." At the time, I believed the tears rose from her great pride in me, but now I know they were tears for what I would have to face in school that day.

When I walked into the classroom, my classmates turned to look at me, their noses wrinkled up in their usual fashion. Hugh sneered and pointed at my basket. "Whatcha got there, Bud?" he asked, then let his wrist go limp and said, "It's real *puurrrty*, whatever it is you got there." The class, the whole class, erupted in laughter. I made my way to my desk and sat down, putting the basket of teas by my feet and telling myself that, when the time came for the Valentine's Day party, they'd understand.

Stapled to the back bulletin board were twenty-five construction paper mailboxes, one for each of the twenty-four students in the class and one for our teacher, Miss. Makechatter. When I squinted my eyes and looked at the wall, all those twenty-four mailboxes turned into one beautiful pink blur.

Before first recess, Miss. Makechatter set aside twenty minutes for us to put Valentine's cards in boxes, and I watched as other students put their cards in the boxes, even putting cards in mine. Miss Makechatter had a rule that everybody had to give cards to everybody in the class, not just the favorites, so I was assured twenty-five cards in my box just like everybody else.

While everybody was scurrying around the back wall dropping cards into boxes, Miss. Makechatter came to my desk and asked why I didn't join them.

"I'm waiting if I can, please, Miss. Makechatter, until everybody goes out to recess. I want mine to be a surprise."

Now, I wouldn't say that Miss. Makechatter was a mean teacher, but I don't think she really ever had control of herself. She was a coffee drinker, and even then I had a sense of the sort of poison coffee could be. Her right hand always held her "#1 Teacher!" coffee mug. In addition to the "#1 Teacher!" slogan, it had assorted apples, numbers, and letters on it, making it look friendly somehow. At least, it seemed to me that was the purpose of the decorations. In her classroom, a pot of coffee was always brewing, and she was forever drinking the stuff. Her skin had the color and texture of a used coffee filter, brown-streaked and warm-damp. Her teeth had encountered so much coffee, they were not only stained, but had taken on the shape and color of whole black coffee beans which clung tenuously to her coffee ground gums. Perhaps they had even become coffee beans that could be plucked and ground into a final cup of coffee if the world should ever run out.

“And what have *you* got that’s so special, Bud Blackenberry?” she asked, her eyes darting about the room like startled hummingbirds even as she talked to me.

“Please, Miss Makechatter,” I said, “I want it to be a surprise. Even, ma’am, for you.”

She leaned down to look at the basket beneath my desk, and before I could bend down to cover the tea sachets, she must have guessed what I had. She harrumphed but humored me. “If you must, Bud Blackenberry, you can have the room to yourself for the first five minutes of recess, but that’s all you can have. I need to walk down to the cafeteria to pick up my new shipment of coffee—they order it in bulk for me, you know—and then I’ll be back so you’d better be done with whatever it is you’re putting in those mailboxes.”

I was so happy! Five minutes wasn’t long, but it should be just long enough. Miss Makechatter dismissed the class for recess and left me alone in the room. I placed the tea sachets into the mailboxes with care, making sure they were right side up and on top of all the cards and red heart-shaped suckers. I even had a special one for Miss Makechatter—Miss Makechatter’s Morning Thunder—which I had endowed with that ingredient she most liked (or so I thought) in coffee—caffeine. Of all the teas I made for that very special Valentine’s Day, only this one made it on the market.

I had just slipped Miss Makechatter’s Morning Thunder into her mailbox when she opened the door and walked in, pushing a dolly bearing a fifty-pound bag of coffee beans. “All right, Bud Blackenberry,” she said as she opened her slim closet and heaved the bag inside, “go outside. There are twenty minutes of recess left and you need to go out and get some fresh air.” She was right about that. The smell of coffee was making me sick.

I sat on my usual swing on the far end of the playground, waiting anxiously for recess to end and for the Valentine’s Day party to start. It would, I was certain, be grand. When the whistle blew, we all raced to get in line—none of our usual dawdling today.

Within the short time I had been outside, Miss Makechatter and several mothers had taped red, white, and pink streamers from one end of the classroom’s ceiling to the other. On our desks were red Valentine’s Day search-a-word sheets with words like “heart,” “love,” “chocolate,” and “kiss” printed at the bottom. Miss Makechatter’s desk was cleared of its usual stacks of papers and books, and in their place were tinfoil pans filled with red-sprinkled cupcakes, cupid cookies, and heart-shaped finger Jell-O. Even the hard-to-impress kids in the class came unglued at the sight of sugar in its many guises. While I myself had always preferred honey and pitied my classmates’ addiction to white death, even I must admit to being tempted.

Miss Makechatter gave us a “ready, set, go” and we started in on our search-a-word sheets. The children whose mothers had come received extra help, so it was no surprise when Hugh and his mother (who had been hired, as everybody knew, to find needles in haystacks after the Nisco Needles truck lost control and barreled into Farmer Harv’s Hayhouse) found all the words first and won a giant chocolate heart.

Finally, the time came for opening cards. “Before you have treats,” Miss Makechatter said, “you can take your mailboxes down from the wall and read your cards.”

Everybody but me rushed to the back bulletin board and ripped off their mailboxes. I was more interested in seeing what they thought of my gift than I was in reading the cards they had written for

me out of obligation.

Hugh got to his first and read my note aloud: “Hibiscus Hugh: Here’s a little hibiscus to see you through. From Bud Blackenberry.” Hugh screwed up his face and held my tea sachet out at arm’s length, letting it dangle between thumb and forefinger. “What is this crap, Bud?” he asked, but before I had time to explain, he had dropped it on the floor and stomped on it like it was a roach. As red hibiscus powder poofed out on the floor and over Hugh’s white canvas shoes, I heard a high-pitched shriek and turned around to see Hugh’s mother, red-hot. “You freak! How dare you stain my son’s new shoes!” I tried to say, “But he wasn’t supposed to stomp on it,” but she started hitting me about the head, and nobody tried to stop her, not even Miss Makechatter. Between the blows, I made out my other classmates’ reactions to their gifts and saw my inventions, those one-of-a-kind blends, die a variety of deaths. Sweet Sue Spice was spat upon; Zany Zed Zinger was channeled into an electrical outlet and zapped; Minty Matthew was mightily munched; Because I Clove You, Clara was cleaved in two by scissors; Won’t You be My Lemon, Linda was left floating in the toilet. And Miss Makechatter’s Morning Thunder? This, I knew, was my final hope. Would she respond in kindness and understanding? I watched her read silently the paper on which I had written, “Miss Makechatter’s Morning Thunder: For picking you up in the morning and helping you go all day long.” She didn’t stomp on the tea like Hugh had done, nor did she drown it like Linda. Instead, a crooked smile cracked her face and she began to laugh, not the pleasant laugh of somebody who has found something to take pleasure in, but a decidedly cruel laugh that percolated from between her lips like bitter coffee. And then she walked to her closet, her too small closet with the huge bags of coffee beans, ripped open one of the bags and began throwing coffee beans at me. She didn’t have to say why she did it; that much was clear. She wanted nothing to do with herbs—hearty, healthy herbs. And she wanted nothing to do with me.

I ran out of the classroom feeling the sting of cruelty and coffee beans. I ran towards home, not knowing how or if I could run that far, just knowing that I needed to get away, as far away as possible. Five blocks from home, I saw my mother, kneeling on the pavement with her arms outstretched. I ran into them and buried my face in her blackberry hair. And even though I reeked of coffee, she held me close. Then she lifted me up in her strong arms and picked the coffee beans, like little black beetles, from my hair. I could not speak and she did not. She carried me all the way home. Just inside the door, she knelt before me again and undressed me, the coffee beans falling from my clothes to clack against the tile floor. And then, standing naked before her, my eyes met hers. “I love you, Bud Blackenberry,” she said. And then, “Will you be my valentine?” Still I could not speak, but I half smiled as she stood, took my hand, and walked me to the bathroom door. “Go inside,” she said. “You’ll feel better.” She turned and walked away. For a moment, I stood looking at my reflection in the shiny knob of the bathroom door. And then my hand reached out and turned the knob. Strong, hot, peppermint steam embraced me, burning away the bitter stench of coffee. I breathed deeply, walked inside, and heard the door close behind me. Before my toes touched tea, I felt its therapeutic tingle.

My life can be summed up in that Valentine’s Day. I always believed the best of people and I always believed that drinking herbal tea leads to healthy, happy lives. As far as I could tell, the only

reason Miss Makechatter and the rest of the world were so out of sorts was because they didn't drink enough herbal tea.

At home, Mom did everything she could to make life ideal. She was Celestial Seasonings' first quote-finder, though she was never granted the official title. She plastered inspirational quotes on the walls and put them in with my sack lunch along with sunny pictures of exotic places. "If you give love, you get love." That was one of her favorites. I never knew who had said it first—there was no name beside it. Some famous person probably. Or maybe just my mother. Back in the early days, she chose whatever quotes she liked best, and she had a knack for it. Only later, when money and marketing entered into the mix, did my father hire somebody to find quotes and test them out on people before they could go on the boxes. Marketing potential. That's what he was looking for.

A week after that Valentine's party in third grade, I found myself sitting in a different classroom at a different school, a private school that wasn't recognized by the city of Boulder, let alone the state of Colorado. One wall of my new classroom was painted with a bright mural of rabbits pushing wheelbarrows full of peaches; another wall had a mural of two children picking blackberries in a forest; the Sleepytime Bear smiled sleepily down at us from above the chalkboard, and the back bulletin board was filled with inspirational quotes my mother had provided. I was one of four students in my class, and for the first time in my life, I felt loved and at home from the start.

Not surprisingly, I became all the more committed to the vision of Celestial Seasonings, even helping to write "The Celestial Seasonings Story" in fifth grade. The closing line was all mine and I believed it passionately: "Celestial Seasonings strives to bring truth, beauty, and goodness to grocery shelves with 100% natural and delicious teas in packages adorned with inspired art and timeless philosophy and literature." "Inspired art and timeless philosophy and literature." How solidly I believed that! I scoffed at the work of Picasso, scorned Van Gogh for his thick daubs of paint. They could not compare to Beth Underwood, Catherine Deeter, and (best of all) Braldt Bralds. My English teacher, Chamomile Teague, praised me for my writing, said that I could do anything I set my mind to. And at that moment in time, she might have been right.

There came a point, however, when I couldn't handle the contrast between the sunny world of Celestial Seasonings and the things that happened to me in real life. It began in 1986, the year the Gourmet Black Tea Line was introduced, the year my father quit so he could travel and help people, the year I turned fourteen. I can talk calmly about this now, and intelligently, but before NATAS found me, I was unable to; I didn't have the words for it, didn't even allow myself to consciously acknowledge it. And so I retreated into the worlds presented in Celestial Seasonings' artwork and tea box literature, all comforting fantasies, whatever the particular spin.

At home with my mother, we had for years kept the artwork of Celestial Seasonings' domestic fantasies in our living room: a woman picking apples; a woman with wind-blown hair drinking a cup of tea atop a rocky hill, a black and white dog by her side; a family dressed in starched white clothes picnicking in a park. All of these characters were white, and most were women. The men present were not masculine in any traditional sense, but were instead dressed up like Edwardian dandies. Before I reached my teenage years, Mom and I would act out the scenes that surrounded us, drinking teas and engaging the characters in conversation. Some nights, we draped green silk over two coat

trees and played at picking apples and talking to Blossom while we drank Cinnamon Apple Spice. “What beautiful apples we have this fall, don’t you think?” Blossom would say to us, and Mom would reply, “Lovely,” while I blushed and hid behind the tree, peeking out only occasionally to see Blossom giving me a sideways look. Other nights, when we were feeling bolder, we would stack all the blankets and pillows in the house in the center of the floor and climb them together to meet Evelyn with the wind-blown hair and her faithful dog Blaze. From the northernmost corner of the room, a fan would be blowing and our hair too would flare out on one side. And we’d sit and sip with Evelyn, and Blaze would nuzzle me under the chin. Then, together, we would look out to sea. “You’re so strong, Evelyn,” Mom would say, pulling a blanket around her to protect her from the wind’s sharp chill. But my favorite nights were those when we spread a checkered blanket over the green shag carpet and joined the family in the park. Mom would recline in the arms of a gentle man in white, and I would climb up on their laps. My brothers and sisters would come with hoop and stick, wanting to play, but I could not be bothered.

I had my own private places, my own private fantasies, too. When I was young, my bedroom had been decorated with rabbits wheeling peaches around in wheelbarrows, of children gathering herbs in a fairy tale forest, of the cozy cottage of the Sleepytime Bear, but by the time I reached junior high, I was too old for all that and redecorated. Mina, the Mandarin Orange Spice woman, with hair pinned back and sliced orange in her outstretched hands, occupied the wall above my bed, and before sleep each night, I would stand on the bed and press my lips against hers, always tasting a hint of citrus. And every morning when I opened my eyes, I saw Trina the Tension Tamer, dressed in red and sitting comfortably upon her dragon. Mina and Trina filled my dreams, charging the air with odors both familiar and new that hung heavy in the air. And when I awoke, a thick spicy-sweet fluid glazed my bedsheets, secreted from every pore of my body.

It’s embarrassing to think about my adolescence, let alone write about it, let alone share it with others. Last night as I was cleaning house, sorting through the physical artifacts of my existence, I discovered a box of journals I kept, beginning with the occasional entry at age fourteen. I sound pathetic, alternating between handwritten pleas to the “Maker of Herbal Delights,” asking for a more sustained devotion, a greater understanding for others, the self-control to stop doing “obscene things” in the mint room. Such small traumas they seem now, all that anguish over unimportant things, all that idealism about changing the world, idealism that soured like damp spearmint when my father banished me from all Celestial Seasonings properties at fourteen years of age.

“Quality control,” was all he said when he found me in the mint room, then turned his back to me as I pulled up my pants and hurried out. On my way past him, I mumbled an apology, said it wouldn’t happen again if only he would let me stay, but he wouldn’t look at me, wouldn’t say a word. I stood for awhile on the border between the mint room and the rest of Dad’s factory, smelling mint behind me and a strange mix of fresh-cut blackberry leaves and machinery oil before me. And though I wanted to focus on the silence of the mint room just a while longer, the whirs and chunka-chunkas of the machines wouldn’t let me, noises I don’t think I had ever noticed before. So I stepped outside the mint room, looking at the factory my father had built, the factory which milled and blended and packaged nature only to be consumed from teacups, and I heard the door to the

mint room clang shut behind me as the odor of mint was concealed.

At fourteen years of age, I felt adrift, and so I set about trying to “do things right” unlike my father, trying to get things natural. Too ashamed to return to the Celestial Seasonings school for fear that word had gotten out about the mint room, I quit school altogether, staying in my bedroom for days at a time, making the two-dimensional worlds of Celestial Seasonings three-dimensional through sculptures, creating an atmosphere where Mina and Trina and all the others might truly come to life. My mother home schooled me, more certain than ever that I could succeed where my father had failed, that I would keep the vision pure, that I would keep money out of it—easy enough to do since we had no money to speak of. We still drank Celestial Seasonings teas by the gallon, we still believed in the artwork and philosophy that graced the boxes, we just weren’t sure about the direction my father had taken things, who he had become as a result.

From a distance, I observed what was happening in my father’s company—sold first to Kraft, a near merger/monopoly with Lipton in 1988 (the year I “graduated” from home school high school), the move to 4600 Sleepytime Drive in 1990, my father’s return in 1991. I tried many times to get back to the mint room, to regain my father’s favor, but it was no good. I wanted to be a part of it all but my father would not allow it, did not want me near. When my mother fell asleep and didn’t wake up—an apparent Sleepytime overdose—it just became too hard to live so close to the center of the Celestial Seasonings world.

And so at the age of twenty-one I moved to Boston for no other reason than it was far from Boulder, to an apartment of my own. I didn’t work but lived off the allowance my father dished out every month, a modest sum but enough to cover the rent, all the tea I could drink, and food from a local whole foods market. And I began to build walls around myself inside my own apartment, walls of Celestial Seasonings tea boxes that insulated me from the world. For though I believed herbal tea could change the world, my few attempts to share that with others ended badly. I still smelled funny, after all.

I didn’t return home until 1999, the year Celestial Seasonings took to poisoning prairie dogs. My father, wanting to make amends, had invited me to return to take the Tour of Tea with his usual Christmas card. When I went, I still believed, still wanted to believe, in the world that Celestial Seasonings promoted on their tea boxes, and at first, I found what I wanted to be true.

Everything and everybody inside the new tourist center was bright and delightful. Lots of windows. Lots of yellow. Lots of women and young children waiting around for the 11:00 Tea Tour. Only three men. Children especially liked the big stuffed Sleepytime Bear, complete with red cap and sleeping in a huge overstuffed chair. I walked over to him and said hello, old friend that he was. I loved the fact that I saw three generations of women—a grandmother and mother holding the hands of a young girl, perhaps as old as eight—experiencing Celestial Seasonings together. I even loved the quotes on placards, some the same as those on the tea boxes I knew and loved, some new even to me. Above my mother’s old Singer sewing machine on display for all to see was a line from Shakespeare: “How far that little candle throws his beams. So shines a good deed.” And I couldn’t help but think, couldn’t help but believe that my father chose this one personally for my mother.

I walked over to a large display of teas in a wooden cupboard, all open and available for tasting.

Five were foregrounded, the Maté teas and the Chai, all of which have caffeine, but Maté I could handle because the caffeine doesn't have the same side effects as coffee and black or green teas. Instead, Maté enhances mental alertness without causing sleeplessness or jitters, a fact I remember from creating Miss Makechatter's Morning Thunder. I took a Tropical Maté Zinger bag from the box, dropped it into a paper cup, and added hot water.

I sat and sipped my tea and looked around. Above the entranceway to the Art Gallery sat an old friend, the Bengal Spice tiger I had created in my bedroom during my last days in Boulder. Though I wondered how they acquired the tiger, I was glad to see him there looking as strong and alert as ever.

Before the tour, I refilled my cup with iced Lemon Zinger and shuffled into the art gallery along with everyone else. The tour guide, Mica, a pretty woman with strawberry curls, dimmed the lights so that those of us gathered for the tour could watch a video describing how my father, Mo Siegel, gathered herbs from the surrounding Colorado countryside at the age of nineteen and began drying them and selling them as tea. "We're looking to herbs to keep us healthy with the power of nature," the voice on the video said. And as pictures ran across the screen of the young crazy-haired Mo and his happy band of herb grubbers, my mother among them, I couldn't help but think how lucky I was to have been a part, even a small and unknown part, of it all. Until I took the tour.

Maybe I wanted too badly for everything to be natural, even though I knew it wouldn't, couldn't be. Maybe I wanted to walk inside the new factory and have it not be a factory but instead be fields full of people picking and drying herbs under the heat of the big red sun. Even though I knew it wouldn't be like that, I wanted it to be.

I took note of the order of things on the processing and packaging side of the factory, so different from the days my mother sewed with her Singer, and read the signs above the machinery: "Double Package Maker," "Tea Bagging," "Straight Line Closer," "Overwrap," "Case Packing," "Robotic Palletizer." A handwritten sign on a pallet of boxed teas read, "Leave here for Robot Programmer. Thanks!" Forklifts zipped in and out, and Mica was careful not to let anybody walk in front of her for fear, I think, of them being run over. She was bright and eager, executing her lines flawlessly, gesturing dramatically to the group, saying things like "this factory runs 5-7 days a week," and "During the winter months, Celestial Seasonings experiences its highest productivity due to high demand for teas," and, "When in full swing, we produce 8 million bags of tea each week," and "All the machinery in the factory is made in United States, except the Tea Bagging machine which came all the way from Italy." She pointed to an area above the main factory floor, "the mixing room," and an elderly woman asked if the group might go up there to see all the herbs being mixed into teas, all computer monitored so each batch is precisely alike. "Oh, no, Ma'am, Mica said kindly. We never take tours up there. It's too dangerous." I nodded, thinking not of herbs but of the mixing of Mo, Mom, Money, and Me.

And I, along with the rest, followed Mica to the exit where she handed out sample packs of Wild Berry Zinger. Then she ushered us through a door above which hung a placard with a picture of a woman I recognized as Evelyn looking out to sea and the Ralph Waldo Emerson quote, "Nothing can bring you peace but yourself." But this didn't fit. With everything else around me clanking or humming, with all the factory workers wearing earplugs and the forklifts and pallets full of carton

upon carton of tea, it just didn't fit somehow.

I took off my hair net and threw it away, then walked through the factory exit door into a shop selling "Wings of Love All-Natural Lipstick," "Burt's Beeswax Lip Balm," "Jelly Belly Fruit Bowl Flavors," "Jelly Belly 39 Flavors," "Jelly Belly Tropical Flavors." And tea. Lots and lots of Celestial Seasonings tea, including bushels of reject teas in dented boxes with imperfect covers, boxes that had gotten caught on the line and mangled unmercifully by unnatural appendages. Large women, small women, effeminate men grabbing at boxes, loading them up in their arms or their baskets, fighting over the one 40-count box of Lemon Zinger in the bunch, yammering about cheap prices, not caring if they couldn't read the quotes on the boxes, not caring if the artwork was ruined. Over their shoulders I could see one box of Peppermint, machinery claw marks through its candy-striped lid, and before I knew what I was doing, I had reached down and rescued it from all the flailing hands, tucked it under my shirt, and took off running past the children being fitted with Sleepytime Bear T-shirts, past the postcard display, past the cashier yelling "Stop, thief!"

Three days later, my landlady found me submerged in my bathtub, submerged but not dead. Twenty tea bags floated at the top of a peppermint bath gone cold. Peppermint permeated my pores, and when I arose from the water my skin was a pale green. And at the bottom of the tub, written in permanent red marker, my favorite line from Celestial Seasonings' Peppermint Herb Tea box: "Settle into an intimate cove and while away a few moments on yourself, letting the delectably sweet taste of peppermint pour over your thoughts."

Lynne Chien

The Problem with Dreaming in Color

We were sitting down
waiting for an assembly.

You came in last and sat close to the door,
you looked different and old.

You were sweating,
hair was thinning,
and I think I saw a few liver spots.

You must have noticed me
notice your changes.
“What, you don’t recognize me anymore?”

I gave you a quick hug and you said
we should talk in the hallway
because the principal is starting.

But you talked so loud.

So loud, the principal stopped
mid opening statement
and you said,
“Excuse me Mr. Montem.”

So we leave, talk in the hallway, hug again.

But you become pale
clammy and zit-faced.

Your hair turns dark brown and I struggle
to escape your embrace.

You are an imposter,
nothing like how I remember you.

And then you really show up:
leather jacket just the way I remember
you come with two police men,
point to the creepy brown-haired man

“It’s this guy
he’s been screwing with my life
ever since he cashed a cheque
I got in the mail.”

I scramble to get up off the floor,
somehow I end up there with the man
pretending to be you.

I run over to
put my arms around you.
I put my cheek
against the cool leather
and breathe deep your scent.

You’re taken aback by my forwardness.
Hesitate, then push me
gently away with two hands.

This is how I know
you really are the same man
I knew.

You are, after all, still married.

William McGee, Jr.

Neither Heaven Nor Hell

I think I've learned exactly how the fall of man occurred in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, and Adam said one day, "Won, Eve, here we are, at one with nature, at one with God, we'll never age, we'll never die, and all our dreams come true the instant that we have them." And Eve said, "Yeah . . . it's just not enough, is it?" – Bill Hicks

Before Armageddon, Henry was a *barely* mediocre doctor of osteopathy—he kept patients waiting when he was late from the health club, he misdiagnosed several patients, and he came damn close to losing his business because of three malpractice suits. And Henry really wasn't an ethical businessman: he knowingly overcharged several unaware patients, he promised his nurses raises they would never receive, and he cheated the medical insurance companies, so much so that most major medical providers refused to cover any services provided by his office. But, two years before Henry died, he figured out a way to stop filing insurance altogether yet increase the amount of cash coming into his practice in Suite 111.

Each of our patients receives the HIGHEST-QUALITY VIP SERVICE. Henry adopted this claim as his mission statement and plastered it across his business cards and promotional pens, his website, the wall of his waiting room, the mailed brochures addressed "Occupant," and the advertisements in the phone book and the free newspapers. *We are able to devote the time necessary to provide this level of care and attention because **we do not participate in any managed care plans, and we do not file insurance.** Instead, we ask that you please pay your entire bill at the time of service—just as you do with any of your other service providers: your hairdresser, veterinarian, auto mechanic, etc.—if you are satisfied with the quality of the service you receive.* Of course, Henry was forced to give some of his patients completed insurance claim forms that they could mail to their insurance companies in order to be reimbursed. Yet, whenever he could, he removed the insurance companies from the equation, those institutions that had rejected him yet, in doing so, lessened their chances for taking a percentage of his profits.

Thus, the size of his practice grew, Henry swore *You don't have to pay extra for VIP TREATMENT*, and his profits tripled. A bachelor, Henry bought a brand new Audi, a plasma screen HDTV, memberships at a health club and shooting range, neoprene jogging clothes for use at the health club, a Walther PPK for use at the shooting range, and a new computer with the fastest Internet connection available. His hobby became ordering hundreds of DVDs, most of which he never got around to watching in his home theater. Henry had been agnostic before Armageddon, but later imagined that any faith or devotion to God would be too little, too late.

On the morning before the Rapture, Henry powered up the virtually noiseless generator so he could turn on his TV. He'd been listening to his battery-powered radio, and Big Daddy Mac Johnson, the announcer on WZZY's morning show, mentioned that CNN was back on the air, piggybacking

on the Emergency Broadcasting System. Big Daddy—or Duane Johnson, as he mostly called himself now, after his co-hosts Sky Lopez and Tha Dutty Dawg had been killed by unhappy listeners, apparently prompting him to switch from “nuttin’ but hip-hop 24/7” to an all-gospel format—had encouraged local Cincinnati viewers to tune in to the news channel before reading a list of grocery stores that were not open for business until further notice. As far as Henry knew, the satellites were still in geosynchronous orbit, and the cables still ran from his TV (mounted above his fireplace mantle) to the jack in the wall and beyond. But when the demons and angels appeared and began warring with each other across the Holy Land and much of the planet, the networks had struggled to cover the news and continue broadcasting with limited success. As Henry realized when he flipped through several channels of snow, apparently some networks had been neglected enough to prevent viewers from watching TV Land or VH1 Classics anytime in the near future. But then he switched to channel 3, and, as Big Daddy Mac had promised, he could receive the emergency transmission.

The image was grainy, as the public service announcement for bottled water ended abruptly. Henry held his breath and sat forward, staring at the now dark and silent screen, clutching his robe to his otherwise nude body, when suddenly the familiar voice of James Earl Jones intoned “THIS IS CNN,” followed by the words “The Last Battle? CNN Presents a World Besieged” scrolling up the screen. The image then jounced a few times as if being filmed by an inexperienced hand-held camera operator and was replaced by a shot of a young anchor, sitting behind the news desk.

“Welcome back, viewers. This is Javier Bolinger, and we are currently broadcasting, periodically throughout the day on the EBS, in order to bring you the breaking news on our, uh, current situation.”

It felt good to be watching a TV program again, Henry decided; it was a much more communal experience than watching that DVD of *Amelie*, the cover of which he was currently using as a coaster for his cup of coffee. If CNN was back, then that had to mean viewers were out there somewhere, other survivors of the Apocalypse, the famine, the pestilence, etc., like him, sitting at home watching. Even the scroll at the bottom of the screen had been resurrected, flickering once, disappearing, but then reappearing as Javier Bolinger listed the recent death tolls in the world’s major cities.

“Finally, the battle over Jerusalem continues. As what seems to be thousands of the angelic and demonic soldiers wage war upon each other high above the holy city, human casualties are mounting, among the observers and other bystanders who have made the pilgrimage to witness this unprecedented event. We now go by video phone to Oishi McGuire, live in Jerusalem.”

Henry watched and sipped his coffee as the screen switched to an even grainier image of the ruins of dust-colored, smoldering buildings streaked with blood. A large winged creature plummeted from the raging unearthly legions, advancing across the smoky skies, and crashed through the roof of a burning truck. Henry was so absorbed in the horrific action that he jumped when Ms. Marceau came out of the kitchen and spoke.

“Hey, that scroll thing on the bottom? It just said that Congress is putting ‘under God’ in the Pledge of Allegiance,” she said. “Plus, in the National Anthem, on the Presidential Seal, and on the flag.” She sipped her coffee and sat across from Henry, running her fingers through her graying hair.

“It’s encouraging to see that they’re still taking care of the really important issues.”

Henry has almost forgotten she’d come home with him last night, after she had offered him a ride home from the mostly looted Home Depot. When he lost his Audi to one the riots, he took his neighbors’ Cabriolet, as they had disappeared and Henry doubted he’d ever see them again. The Cabriolet ran okay, but he only had so much gas stored in the garage, so it made sense to walk there, his Walther in the holster on his hip, to scavenge some batteries. In fact, Henry was so sure of this conviction that he had been amazed, disgusted almost, to see that Ms. Marceau had actually been wasting gasoline on running simple errands—in an SUV, no less. “We never did finish watching that movie last night,” Henry felt obliged to mention, gesturing to the DVD of *Amelie* that he had mentioned to her to her and that she had voiced interest in seeing the night before. And just like that, she had come home with him. He still admired how good the now forty something “Kathy” Marceau looked—or, rather, as he still thought of her, Ms. Marceau, his high school French teacher he’d fantasized about, on and off, for the last ten years.

“What movie?” she asked. “Oh, yeah—that. Whatever.” She watched another PSA, this time for kerosene, and yawned. “Say, sweetie, didn’t you mention that you have hot water for the shower? Mind if I use some?” Henry actually did mind, but he shrugged as Ms. Marceau got up and walked to his bathroom.

After using his hot water and dressing in the privacy of the bathroom, Ms. Marceau appeared finally to be leaving. She thanked Henry for the evening and his hospitality, kissed him on the forehead, and left, after unlatching both deadbolts, disconnecting the chain, and removing the heavy iron bar.

Henry secured the door behind her and watched a few more minutes of CNN—including a story about rioters in the Vatican City who had been slaughtered by armed Papal guards, and in interview with a humbled rabbi and a defiant Muslim cleric—before he switched it off and turned on his radio again. The dramatic noise of the TV replaced by Big Daddy Mac’s soft gospel music, he realized he could still hear the engine of Ms. Marceau’s Mitsubishi Endeavor running outside his house. He looked through the barred windows at the front of her house, from which he could see his front step, but his three-car garage blocked any sight of her SUV. Henry shut off his radio, got his Walther PPK, and stepped outside into the brisk air and bright sun.

The demon squatted and licked its claws, its back against Ms. Marceau’s Endeavor, and dark gore covering the scaled chest and elongated snout of the large reddish-black abomination. The demon grimaced, rubbing its temples and squinting its yellow eyes, then saw Henry.

“Hey, buddy,” the demon said, lifting a massive claw in what Henry guessed was a wave. “How’s it going?”

Henry froze and then looked at his pistol. Ms. Marceau was nowhere to be seen, but the engine of the SUV was still running, the doors were shut, and its radio was softly playing bass-heavy music. Henry hid his Walther PPK behind his robe. “What—what are you . . . ?”

The demon slowly got to its hooves, groaning and spreading its vast wings. It towered several feet above Henry, and its wings audibly stretched further than the length of Ms. Cabriolet’s car. Henry noticed black ooze seeping from vicious slits in the beast’s scaly hide. “Look, friend,

I've had a pretty rough day. You have no friggin' idea what it's like being slapped up and down your 'holy lands' by Chamuel and those other archangels." It closed its yellow eyes before it grimaced and arched its back, and Henry heard several sharp cracks, like the sound of a set of China shattering on the sidewalk. "They chased us all the way across that goddamn freezing-cold ocean."

"The ocean . . . ?" Henry tightened his robe around his body and didn't no what to say. "You mean the Pacific?"

"Whatever. All I know is I'm *cold*, I'm *hurt*, and I'm *hungry*." The demon regarded the tip of its claw and licked the end of bent talon. "What have you got to eat inside?"

"Where's Ms. Marceau?" Henry asked. "Where's Kathy? What have you—"

The demon frowned disagreeably at Henry, who instantly shut his mouth. It opened the door to the SVU, shut off the engine, and removed the keys. "What do you say we go inside, sit down, and like I said, treat ourselves to something to eat?" It stumbled away from Henry and ducked under the eave above the front door to Henry's house. "I might have some bad news for you, but if you can scrounge us up, say, an omelet or pancakes or something, I'll try to break it to you as gently as possible."

Three days after the Rapture, Henry awoke to the feeling of the weight of his body, the sobering closure of his consciousness, the sensations of his bedroom, the mattress he lay upon, the light sheets he'd slipped beneath three days earlier. You will die tonight, the demon had told him, over bacon and eggs. Don't worry—there's nothing you can do about it. Tonight, when the battle is lost—we lose, that is, and the angels win, of course, big surprise there—when that happens, everybody on the planet dies.

So that's it, then? Henry asked.

"Actually, no, it's not," the demon said, shaking ketchup onto its plate of eggs. Henry had scrambled an entire dozen of them. "You've heard of the Rapture? That's why you're all dying tonight. That's how a rapture works—once everyone dies, all the good little souls go up to heaven, and all the bad souls, of course, go to hell. But then there's souls like yours."

"Excuse me? Souls like mine?" Henry asked. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Not good enough for heaven, not bad enough for hell," the demon explained.

"So where do I go? Purgatory?"

"In a manner of speaking," the demon answered, opening the fridge and retrieving two bottles of beer. "Three days later you will be resurrected. You'll wake up with the other tweeners and live the rest of your days here, on this planet, a godless earth." The demon twisted off the caps and poured both bottles into its gaping mouth.

"A godless earth?" Henry asked. "Does that mean what it sounds like?"

The demon put the bottles down and wiped the beer from its chin. "Look, I didn't make up this plan. You think I want to lose this war? How do you think I feel? I have to fight in the mother of all battles, all the time knowing I'm going to lose. And even though I know my side is doomed, even though I can foresee the end, there's not a goddamn thing I can do about it. You ever slam a door on your hand, and at the last second you see yourself just about to do it—but you're still powerless to stop slamming the door anyways? That's what this is like: I'm just playing my role, like everybody

else, whether they're damned or saved—or neither, like you, the ones who God says haven't earned eternal paradise, but also don't deserve the lake of fire. You guys have abandoned him, and I guess he's repaying the favor.”

The demon finished the beer and scooped a claw full of eggs into its mouth. “By the way, you might not want to eat anything tonight—death and resurrection are best on an empty stomach.”

But Henry had insisted on a last meal—steak and mushrooms, and ice cream for dessert—and now he felt nauseous. He sat up, put his hand to his mouth, and was surprised to feel the extent of stubble on his face. His fingernails seemed a little longer, too, he noticed, as his stomach gurgled unpleasantly and the wave of nausea swept over him. Whatever was in his stomach, Henry knew, had to get out.

He stumbled to the bathroom and violently vomited into the toilet bowl. The smell of the rotting food hit him, and he vomited several more times until he could feel as if the taint of decay had been removed, for the most part, from his stomach. Disgusting, Henry thought, curled into a ball on the tiled floor. That food's been rotting in my belly since I died, he realized. He flushed the dead man's vomit and eventually stood, taking some Tums before he left the bathroom.

After Henry had recovered and stumbled from the bathroom to the leather couch in his living room, he closed his eyes tight and tried to remember the last few days. His battery-powered alarm clock he'd ordered from the Sharper Image catalog said it was Sunday. He thought he'd gone to bed the night before—but it wasn't the night before. Of course, the clock could be wrong, but that had to be unlikely. It was advertised to be set by an atomic clock from Greenwich and accurate for 100 years. The demon had probably been right.

Henry sat up and moved to his generator. The TV Guide Channel would show the day—and time and TV listings for over 350 channels, but Henry didn't want those right now. He pulled the ripcord three times, finally started the generator, and turned on his TV.

Henry grabbed his remote control and changed channels, but every network—NBC, TLC, TWC—was the same: nothing was airing. Some networks were broadcasting the colored bars of the TV test pattern, some were showing nothing but noisy black and white static, but every time Henry sampled something new offered by his digital cable service, he tuned to a dead channel.

Yet the date and time in the lower right hand corner read *Sunday 9:27 A.M.*

Henry sat on the couch, remote in hand, and cycled through all his available channels for some sign of life. Nothing. He cycled again, and repeated his circuit, until his thumb hurt and he feared the gas in his generator—already half empty yesterday, or, rather, Friday—might be running dangerously low. He shut off his generator, put on some old clothes, and went into his garage.

Henry grabbed his four gas cans—empty as he'd already known—and arranged them in his wheelbarrow. He directed the wheelbarrow to the side door of his garage and pushed it outside.

The Shell gas station was only a five-minute walk away, through his backyard and that of the house behind his, across the street, around the corner and past the construction site for the new strip mall that now seemed very unlikely.

The body of a petite woman lay on the pavement, just steps from a Honda with an Omega

Omega Omega sticker in the rear window. Henry avoided her, and wheeled to a gas pump at the far end of the Shell station. The first two pumps Henry tried produced no gas, but the third poured forth plentifully. Henry placed all four cans on the pavement, removed the caps, and proceeded to fill them.

Henry screwed the caps onto the cans, and was loading them into his wheelbarrow when the sound of loud engines startled him. A man and woman, both on matching motorcycles, pulled into the station and pulled up beside him.

The man stopped his bike, and immediately put a cigarette in his mouth. He lit it, and puffed dramatically. “Hey, man,” he said to Henry. “You’re number three!” he shouted excitedly, pointing at Henry, cigarette between two fingers.

“Three?” Henry asked, too surprised to say much more.

“The third living person Chuck and I’ve seen since we were reborn this morning,” the woman said, removing the gas nozzle from the pump.

“Do you believe it, man? Kelly and me just met like a couple days ago or whatever, and then we were *both* reborn. Together.” He blew smoke through his nose.

“Kinda like it was meant to be,” Kelly said. “Like karma or something.”

“So, you gotta bike or just that wheelbarrow?” Chuck laughed as Kelly filled her bike’s tank and moved to his. “What I mean is you should come with us, brother. Since this morning, we’ve decided we gotta find others, and we’re gonna start looking in Boulder, Colorado.”

“Where that Steven King movie had all the good people go,” said Kelly, watching the gas fill the tank of Chuck’s bike. “The forces of evil went to Las Vegas.”

“Uh, thanks for the invitation, but I—” Henry paused. He felt strangely compelled to seek out some connection with them—or perhaps with any other human being—but he didn’t really know these people, and he wasn’t sure he wanted to. He watched Chuck flick cigarette ash onto the pavement.

“I just got up, like, a couple of hours ago, and I haven’t really made any decisions yet about, uh, anything,” Henry explained. “I’m afraid I’ll have to respectfully decline.”

“Aw, man, that’s too bad,” Chuck said. “But whatever.” Kelly hung the nozzle on the pump while Chuck screwed the gas cap on. “I understand, man. This shit’s heavy, and it’s hard to know what to do. We thought apologizing to Jesus might be the best way to start. Then maybe he’d reconsider taking us up to the Kingdom.” He and Kelly started their bikes. “Just look us up in Boulder if you ever get out that way.” And with that, Henry watched them ride off into the west.

“So you decided to stay here? *Alone*? I don’t get you. The world ends, and what do you do? Watch TV,” the demon complained, shaking its head disapprovingly. “I know this is all a big shock, but come on! Snap out of it! It could be worse, Henry.” The demon had eaten most of the food in the house, but then left and returned a couple of days later with a couple of cases of beer and several bags of sausage links, hot dogs, and other assorted meat, and now it was currently barbecuing the feast on the charcoal grill in Henry’s backyard. “I mean, at least you’re not the last man on earth, like Charlton Heston in that movie. Did you see that one?”

Henry’s hobby was collecting DVDs, and he remembered not only most of the movies he’d

seen, but also a little of most of the movies he'd seen advertised online. "What was that called—*The Omega Man*? Yeah, I did see it. But Heston wasn't really the last man on earth—there were the albino vampire-things, too."

The demon flipped several burgers at once with its bare claw and smiled. "Oh, yeah! And those hippy-trippy flower children, led by that chick with the Afro?"

"If I remember correctly, though, their world was devastated by a plague, that vampire pandemic—and not by Armageddon, the Rapture, and the final exit of God." He bit into his hot dog. "Nobody in that movie had been 'Left Behind.'"

The demon rolled its eyes. "If you do *not* stop whining, so help me, Henry, I'll cook you on this grill. *Don't* think I wouldn't enjoy it." The demon emptied a large bottle of Tabasco across the pieces of simmering meat. "And even if I did kill you, what'd be the point? At least Heston was *thankful* when he found out he wasn't alone."

Henry didn't feel like discussing whose doomsday was worse, so he went inside, started up the generator, and turned on his TV, hoping to find someone else who might still be out there.

Hours later, after scanning all available channels provided by his digital cable service and still seeing no evidence of anyone else alive, he shut off his generator. He'd check again later. He could always get more fuel from the Shell station for now, but he still saw no sense in wasting fuel by watching dead TV channels all day.

Several days later, after he'd made three more trips to the Shell station, Henry had met or otherwise seen a dozen or so people, but seeing no signs of human activity on the airwaves, he stopped shaving, then bathing, at first to save fuel, but then later because what was the point? Whom did he need to impress? Henry had recently contemplated never leaving the house again, except for the precious fuel needed to power his television. He looked at the screen, and still, there was nothing but test patterns, static, and other evidence of dead channels. He watched the digital display on his cable box, glancing at his thumb as it tapped the up channel button repeatedly, and listened to the various bursts of static.

"—if you don't squeeze those buns, nobody—"

Henry quickly looked at the screen, then remembered to stop changing channels. "Squeeze those buns"? He'd heard something, hadn't he, a woman's voice, maybe? Before he considered whether a) if he had indeed heard something, b) if it had indeed been a woman's voice, and c) if he had heard the woman's voice correctly, he depressed the down channel button carefully, not sure exactly on what channel he'd heard that attractive sound.

"And one more! That's great. Now, let's roll to our right side and repeat." The screen displayed a TV test pattern, but Henry listened and watched, entranced by the sound. It was a woman's voice, slightly familiar, too, he thought.

"Especially now more than ever, you've got to focus on every aspect of your life. Work on your body, but also give yourself an attitude makeover, too." An image flickered momentarily, then disappeared, accompanied by the absence of any sound. After a moment of silence, which produced a tremor of panic in Henry's chest, the sound returned, accompanied by the image of a woman.

"—yourself relax and enjoy life's simple pleasures: a beautiful sunset, a bouquet of lilies, a

good book, or a chat with a friend. I'm enjoying the beauty here at my bayside ranch—and if you've been reborn like me, then you know that this world's all we've got."

Henry hadn't recognized the woman's voice, but seeing her, he did know who she was. Every morning, he sometimes flipped from the news to Lifetime for a minute just to see what she looked like that day, to see what outfit she was wearing, to see if she was wearing shorts or the tight exercise pants he preferred on her. Before almost every day he worked, Henry tuned in to see her: Denise Austin, in spandex halter, shorts, or whatever clung to her forty-something, very fit body.

"You've probably lost someone, too, like me. Before my husband, my daughters and I died, I thought that one day, years from now, we'd all be together, for all eternity. But after I was reborn without them, I could only comfort myself with the fact that Jeff and the girls are in a better place."

Henry watched as the screen faltered and the sound cut off again. He'd never really been a fan of her, but he had made a perfunctory point of checking her out most mornings. It was his habit: wait till the news was interrupted by a slow story or a commercial; flip to Lifetime; and admire her trim figure for a minute or so, lingering if she wore longer pants or if she was in a position that accentuated her hips and/or ass. While he did consider her to be an attractive and personable woman, he'd tire of ogling her and switch back to the news or search the Showtimes or Cinemaxes for an early morning skin flick.

Yet now, he swore he heard—what?—*despair* in her voice? No, not despair, but perhaps *need*. He somehow felt—well, drawn to the woman.

"You'll be surprised at how much lovelier the world can be, and how much easier it is to achieve your goals, when you bring a positive attitude to everything you do. I know now I've done bad things, but I'm forgiving myself. I've never lied to my viewers or the readers of my books—but I could have been more honest when we bought this ranch, and I guess I shouldn't have accepted all of those extra payments from the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports."

But you're just watching TV, you moron, he told himself. Forget it, and forget her. It's just the exercise lady on TV, like any other morning. But it wasn't the same, he realized. For starters, it's not morning—but today isn't like any day. Denise Austin the exercise lady, Lifetime Network for Women, hell, the whole concept or whatever of TV itself—all of those things didn't really exist, at least not like they had before.

The demon entered the room, sat on the couch, rubbed the healing wounds on its chest, and contemplated the image on the TV. "This transmission is coming from the east coast—from Maryland, I think."

"She usually broadcasts from some warm resort area, like in Arizona or Mexico or someplace like that," Henry said.

"Yeah, well, I'm telling you she's in Maryland. I'm not supposed to interfere with your special cases, you know, the ones God's decided to abandon, so to help with that, I have this telepathic thing where I can just look at you or listen to you talk, and everything about you just becomes pretty goddamn obvious." The demon looked thoughtfully at the screen for a moment. "Does the name 'Annapolis' mean anything to you? I seem to be getting that."

"She said her husband and kids are gone," Henry said. "She's probably all alone."

“Just like you? Hey, you should take that vehicle outside and go pay her a visit.”

Henry shrugged off the suggestion. “Maryland’s over five hundred miles away.”

“Right, and you’ve got to get back to your office—what, never?” The demon shook its head. “Look, it’s been fun watching you mope and feel sorry for yourself, but I’ve got to get the hell out of here. And all I’m saying is that instead of just sitting around the house, dummy, you could get off your ass, get into that very attractive vehicle outside, and drive to Maryland or wherever the hell she is. Or don’t. It doesn’t really matter to me.” The demon rose and scratched its shoulder. “And, like I said, while I appreciate your hospitality and all, I’ve got to get back to work.”

Henry stepped back as the demon opened the door to the front yard, ducked and fit its enormous frame through the exit. Henry followed as it stepped across the lawn, touched the Endeavor as if to confirm its existence, and extended its wings.

“And thanks for not freaking out too much or getting all ‘Get Thee Behind Me.’” It started loudly flapping the membranes of its wings, and hovered several feet off the driveway. Looking down at Henry, the demon seemed to smile, baring several nasty-looking fangs. “And don’t look so glum—you *will* survive this. But do yourself a favor and stop being such a kvetch.”

Henry stared up into the bright sun as the demon moved higher and further away. Suddenly, the demon shouted something, and Henry saw a brief silver flash. He shielded his eyes with his hand as Ms. Marceau’s car keys dropped musically to the ground.

Danna Ephland

Gemini's Dance

Everything that matters fits inside a bowl.
Its color and glaze bring Gemini to her knees.
She pulls it from the muddy stream with ease,
clay up to her elbows, fists full. She rolls
long coils and winds them in circles uphill.
Bone bowl dancing between her waist and thighs.
Organs pitch and flow, bones rock, shining eyes
at each hip crest, dizzy and blind. Oh, will
or won't you follow her lead? look the fool
again, open-fingered at your window,
ready to trace her sturdy rim and rouse
the dead to waltzing. Gemini on a toadstool
rises, hitches her long dress up to show
the steps. She sings the old roof off the house.

Gemini in the Suburbs

For ten minutes, nobody is mowing their lawn.

Crab grass laughs its foothold firm in turf
sprouting lime cowlicks at time-lapse speed
after storms the drama queen, Mother Nature,
throws down all summer. The quiet is disarming.

This summer, unusually humid, is a threshold. Sill
so far across it becomes tunnel, alternating wind then
water, wind – blowing Gemini back into the house
where she stands inverted asking her brother-in-law,
the pharmacist, how to spell *effects*, as in *side effects*,
figuring if anybody knows, he does. This real estate
has side effects. Side effects you might mistake for
special, the way they vault you through location, location,
locations that you recognize but never actually visit.

NoNieqa Ramos

Abuelita in the Clouds

“You’re gonna live forever, Abuela,” Jesse had said. Stupid. Stupid. Jinx!

He kicked off his sneakers on the porch. The cottage was dark like the inside of a pocket, the stars jacks, the moon a red rubber ball. Just a candle burned, a waterfall of wax spilling over the lip of the table. Inside was quiet, and he could hear the crickets making music with their legs, and the bats making music with their wings. Too quiet.

“Abuela?” Where had she gone? he thought, grabbing a Malta from the fridge. She was always home. The kitchen felt empty, as if there were no table, no spoons, no window for sunshine. Had Abuela already gone to sleep—and without saying goodnight? It was so quiet he swore, if he could swear, that he could hear a star, probably long dead, like an echo from outer space. Jesse closed the curtains to the window, and the shadow of the wooden mermaid on the shelf quivered, the whittled ship sailed into the dark, the carved starfish floated across the wall like one of those heros raised by the gods into the sky. There were too many signs. Something was wrong.

Jesse lay down on his bed without bothering to take his shoes off. The moon, a lone hubcap, spun over the highway of night, crashing like a bowling ball through his empty dream. He jerked up. He had fallen asleep. Creeping out of bed, he wrapped a sheet around his shoulders. The floorboards complained with froggy Creeeaaaks even at his tip-toes. Her door was closed. Pressing his ear to the door, he accidentally pushed it open.

“Abuela?... ABUELA.” She didn’t answer.

He pulled the sheet off his head realizing that he looked like a ghost. The bed was stone-still. His heart clenched like a fist. He snuck right up to the edge to take a peek. She lay on her side facing away from the window; her hair was a blue halo in the moonlight. He leaned in and put his ear to her mouth. Closer. Faint breath like when a girl told you a secret. Did he breathe that lightly when he slept?

“Abuela?”

Was she smiling? Yes. She was dreaming. And if she was dreaming, she was alive. He crossed himself. There was a glass of melting ice on the nightstand and her spectacles, a butterfly perched over the bible. Did grandmas dream of themselves as grandmas, or young like when they were girls and played the *guiro*, raspy percussive gurgles rubbed out of the gourd of a coconut? He put her glasses on and sat on the chair by the window. He felt very serious, as if he had books to balance, dozens of pots and pans broiling, cooling, bubbling, to manage, children to mind. Love was the bone of the chicken that flavored the broth, and the broth that even spread thin nourished hungry mouths. Then he felt a happy sadness, red and blue ribbons intertwined through a graying braid of hair, and he had ashes to spread, life to live, children to write, grandchildren to teach how to walk barefoot in the grass. Love was preserved in Cool Whip containers of *sofrito*, *achiote*, and *caldero*, in the

brown magic of recipes that could be spoken, but never written down.

The outline of his face skipped over the mirror like stones. Papi said he had his great grandmother's jaw, potent like *Sierra de Luquillo*, peaking forever like *Toro Hill*, and Mami said he had Abuelita's, firm like a hoe that will bring beans out of stone earth. Abuelita said he had hair from *Taíno* kings and of course, his grandfather's eyes, that could see the dead in the living and the living in the dead. Jesse was a seer who saw nothing. Where were they all now? Nowhere. Hidden in his jaw? Where was his grandmother? Tucked in the corners of his smile like Mami said, or in the soles of his feet his grandmother had taught him, could walk fearlessly over glass?

Jesse could not find her. In the sheets, she was hidden, like a doll in layers of tissue paper. Or a tiny abuela in the clouds. He gasped, pulled her glasses off, and rubbed his eyes. Grabbing his sheet, he floated off, a ghost with his grandmothers' jaw, his grandfather's eyes, and the hair of *Taíno* kings.

Dreams came on the dragon-tail of sleep. Sleep cast him and his grandmother into a movie-darkness. On the screen, an acorn became a tree; he watched himself sprawl in adolescence from a boy into a man. He could help Uncle Ray push his Datsun up hill when the battery died, he could make a slam dunk over the *Bodega Boys* AJ, or TX, JC or anyone, he could walk Mami home at night through *el barrio* of Bear Women hooking on street corners, *Bodega Boys* grown into *Bodega* men, he could carry his own girl through the doorway like Papi did every year to celebrate when Mami had broken her heel in the Port Authority when she was sixteen, and he had picked it up, and followed her all the way to Brooklyn. Mami kept it in her closet for good luck.

On the movie-screen, he kept growing, sprawling, a tree that could uproot the Triboro Bridge, large enough to move his *padres* uptown where the only place you needed to sign the cross was at church. Jesse in the chair and Jesse on the screen were one. Even his Abuelita with her lightening rod of spine took shelter in the cradle of his arms as he busted through the theater roof, flinging the screen into the sky. He plodded out into the sunlight, setting her in the grass.

She tried to tell him stories, but he was too far away to listen. He tried to tell her secrets, but she was too far away to understand. He wanted her to walk with him, but he walked too fast and she became winded. Finally, he had to set her on his finger like Julia's blue pearl, from Abuelita's story about *la luna y las estrellas*. There was the smell of her skin like pepper, lime rind, cinnamon and cloves, "heart glue" from all the pains her *salves* and stories had mended, and *café con leche*, and he felt at home. But he was afraid that if he did not touch her lightly, her skin would flake like a butterfly wing into dust. Even from on his finger, he had to put her close to his ear to hear her voice. He loved it when she tugged on his ear lobe to tell him something important, like how to capture sunlight, invite a hummingbird to supper; how to fry *platanos* just right with Don Q rum and sugar, or make a bag of *arroz y gandules* stretch into a meal that would feed a Moshulo Parkway. Their visits were only minutes at a time. He had to put her down to catch her breath because air that high was thin. Sometimes she liked when he set her down quickly, so she could feel the wind, her hair flying like six strings of the *cuatro* in Abuelito's famous painting that had transformed the NY subway into a neon guitar. Sometimes, Abuela wanted to be set down slowly, so she could see *la gente*, and rejoice that *la vida* went on.

Then one day she did not say, "*Hasta luego, mijo*. Elevator down!" She said, "Not this time, *mijo*."

Not this time. Raise me up.”

Now, Jesse awoke from his dream, sitting on his grandmother’s bed, and stared into the darkness. Grandmothers weren’t forever. Nothing was.

He had not slept in Abuelita’s room since he was six and thought a chupucabra lurked under his bed. What would Joe Joe or Ronnie think if they saw him now? He didn’t care. Wrapping himself in the clouds of blankets, he hugged Abuelita in her dreams, and Abuelo too, and all the generations of his family.

He lay awake until dusk listening for her breath.

He was not ready.

Amy Wray Irish

Hunger

Remember when the crabs at the aquarium went missing?
Disappearing. They said the staff was stealing.

No evidence left behind. They set up cameras;
They saw. Arm by arm along the ceiling, pipe by pipe,
The octopus came. Tentacle twined to pull, then swing,
Then grasp. Repeat. Repeat. Did they say how far?

One-half a city block from tank to tank, I think. Then
Sinking down below the surface of the water.

It swam. It caught the crabs. Consumed them,
Whole. So determined are our bodies,

So determined are our empty
Shells. So how do we know when we

Are simply hunger in the belly—how do we know
When we are more?

The World of Man

*In 1901, homes in Grand Lake were razed by fire.
There was no water—the lake was frozen.*

Outside, beyond our boundaries—slim circle
Of houses, flimsy wood of walls—
Waits the world of ice. A valley heavy
With the passionless grind of glacier against earth.

Outside, our breath catches on our clothes,
A mist of icicles, a rake of cold coals
Through our lungs. In the dark forest we work, pray
For hearth, for home, for any color other than white.

We pray for the world of man, for fire,
For something to keep flesh and hope alive. But
How strong is our faith, how shallow

The depths of warmth we shelter in? A time of man
Is but a heartbeat to this frozen land. And our fire?
A flint-spark of red, of blood, flaring hot with our loves

And hates, damning us as it alive keeps us alive.
Outside, fingers white as snow, feet heavy as ice
We return home. Flame and cinders await.
Hope as fragile as a match in the darkness,

As dangerous. The frozen waters watch unmoved
Our world burning and falling, our cheeks
Icy with frozen tears. The cold
Claims all, then turns away.

Michael Richards

From Love's Gravity

After office hours, I went out onto San Pedro and got a sandwich at a joint called 'The Garage—a place some guy really had transformed from a garage into a diner. You walked right through the big bay door to get in. I always thought he should have called it the Pit Stop or the Greased Axle or something. Anyway, he made a damn good Reuben and served it with steak fries that had this thin coating of something breaded and spicy. I've never known much about food other than homemade pizza, on which I'm an expert.

Linda Gregory cooked three meals and rotated them. Meat loaf, homemade pizza, and macaroni salad. At least that's how I remembered it. Between the ages of about five and eleven, I helped her make the pizza. It was a family ritual. Bill sometimes joined in. I think I killed the ritual when, at the age of eleven, I reinvented the recipe, posting the ingredients and the procedures on the wall above the oven. I had refined the procedures to such precision—to the exact milligrams for ingredients and the exact seconds for stirring, kneading, rolling, and baking—that I think I took all the fun out of it for Linda and Bill. In the end, they just sat at the table and watched me maniacally working the kitchen.

The waiter, a heavy, black-haired monster with a grease-stained white apron came over with my food and put it in front of me and asked me if I needed anything else. Wondering if he had been an employee of the garage before its transformation, I said, "No. This is great. Thanks."

I bit into the Reuben and put half a steak fry in my mouth. It might have been the memory of the homemade pizza that made my mind wander to what I consider my first relationship fiasco. Or it might have been that I had been thinking about the way Martsie had looked at me through the crook of Diego's arm. Or maybe the fact that I had found the diary of a secret admirer....

3rd grade, special math class for nerds. There's this beautiful blonde staring at me from across the room. She's got these humongous blue eyes and long hair that she twists and puts in the corner of her mouth. Her name is Samantha and she's the daughter of the town doctor. Doctor Bar—something. Bill Gregory and I had gone to a garage sale at their house and I remember staring in awe at all the great stuff they were trying to get rid of. The worst of their stuff was better than the best of my stuff. Bill bought me a skateboard with a dragon sticker on it and I promptly went home and broke my head on our driveway and spent the night in the hospital. When I returned home, the skateboard was gone.

Day after day, the same thing—she stared at me. Sometimes she smiled and wrote something in her notebook. Always she twirled her hair. I fell in love with her.

I went home and asked Bill Gregory what to do about it and he said, "If you're sure she's staring at you, tell her how you feel." Bill was a careful man, and I think he somehow knew that I was destined to be a failure at romance.

I reviewed my logic: consistent staring + smiling + hair twirling + writing in notebook = love. I wrote her a note and slipped it into her desk before class started on a Friday. My heart pounded as she opened the note and read. A big smile came to her lips. She looked over at me and rolled her eyes then turned to the girl behind her—a redhead with an attitude. We called her Firehead.

When class dismissed, the two of them walked by me giggling. It was then that I turned to my right and saw that Mrs. Wilkerson had posted the homework assignments on a piece of paper on the bulletin board. She always wrote them on the chalkboard, where we'd copy them down. Standing in the room alone, I observed for the first time that the overhead projector blocked the view of the chalkboard for anyone sitting in the row where the doctor's daughter sat. My logic had kept me from noticing that they were also posted beside me, just over my head—where the pretty daughter of the town doctor could just see them if she stared hard enough.

For some reason, my relationships always failed. I'd been trying to figure it out for years, and all I had determined was that there was something wrong with the way I followed love so logically. It was like the homemade pizza and the doctor's daughter; I was so sure of what I was doing that I put my head down and charged forward blindly, stopping only when I felt the soft flesh of my relationships under my feet.

As I sat there chewing the best steak fries in town and getting down on myself, I had no way of knowing that in less than an hour, I would meet the owner of the diary I'd found in the observatory—a young woman who would haunt my dreams for years. And in less than a week, I would be searching desperately for her, while wondering why there was another woman in my bed.

time at home

here again, spending time thinking about : what comes next
here, and reading about hometowns and the meaning
of the concept of 'hometown' and its variance between
each and every individual. i am no different : i vary
i miss textures here invisible to any who has not grown
with the land. who cannot see with a child's eye, as i see
what once was grafted onto what exists now. i see a hole
where the glass angulation of marriott stands, fingering
the memory of the weird first kiss by the tunnel
under michigan and the strange threat of sacrifice twice :
with the kiss, first, on the odd coffers of the riverwalk that
winters decompose into pebbled concrete, weed and brick.
the second, on campus, at the small pediment before the chapel
in the graveyard : on a bright, bright winter's day
the ankledeep snow, the cold stone, a tangible beast
with the white glint of sun flashing on iced steel
with his hand pressed hard against my throat :
breathe now : it is only the ghost that gave you e.e. cummings
go further : it was dickey's sheep child always made you feel safe
in a nameless misanthropy
that coaxed kindness towards those
who could make you cry :
breathe : breathe : close your eyes and continue
to the map room. the quiet and broad lateral files of
cellophane-brittle paper sliding across dark walnut
: searching, searching :
but not for kubla-khan wearing his herion dragon
and not dreaming the dream that coleridge dreamt
and not listening to a tell-tale heart or partaking of
a cask of amontillado
but reading emily and trying not to hear the theme
of gilligan's island, and writing my soul without
saying so much as to be trite teenage angst and

The Bend

the thin yellow of sun washed thinner by lake-effect overcast
barely sets to glimmer on the table
a cigarette burns, unsmoked, and turns to ash by means of magic
the undrunk pot of coffee smells of the brown of burn
the mice run the pipes in the quiet between the furnace fires
i'm home : i'm home
motion ceases here : and i need to move

Inheritance

My parents are building
a skeleton of concrete and wood,
sharp angles, framed space.
Their faces sag with the words
closet space, cost efficiency.

I will inherit a house
that has pinned them -caught insects-
to a town that has grown them grey
to match winter. A town they wanted
to trade for sunshine and salt water.

I will inherit indecision,
six months of discussion
over cardboard tubing,
floor plans and price guides.
Perfection buried in tiny blue squares.

I will inherit disputes
never outgrown, angry voices
rasping from floor boards,
expletives escaping with each step.
I will never be able to entertain.

Sara Swanson

Restoration

The ceiling had finally caved. Years the dark stain had spread, starting simply as a blush then a blemish then a bruise until the summer's last big storm brought it all down. Surprisingly the amount of water that landed on the living room carpeting was not all that spectacular. And anticipating the flood, my mother had some months before, during the innocent spring rains, moved the furniture so that her precious velvet settee and her grandmother's treadle Singer were across the room, under the expanse of pale ceiling. Only a church auction fern was beneath the damaged area, a disposable, replaceable pot of greenery set just so as to detract the eye from looking upward. Because that was really the only terrible bit—how should we keep the guests from seeing our ceiling? An intricate Persian rug was on the middle of the floor, a collection of ceramic boys and girls on the shelves, one of my larger paintings on the wall. And in an inspired moment, my father suggested a mirror be placed above the sewing machine. Who can resist a glance when they catch their own eye? It was all a part of our design: look elsewhere, anywhere, but at our flaw.

I had hoped a contractor would have to be summoned, or perhaps a group of able men, men who knew what they were doing and men who would be able to at last fix the problem. But my father's buddy came around, his tool belt swinging off his thick hips. He smelt of onions and diesel. At one point, some time ago, my mother had engineered a date of sorts for us—a drive-thru, a bowling alley, the bowling alley's warm beer. The only memorable part—he hit a raccoon with his truck and when I punched him in the biceps he asked me what I was doing next Friday. When I told my mother about this she said that I hadn't the time to be choosy.

A ladder was drawn from the garage and my father and his friend climbed it. While I was holding the side as they ascended, my father winked at me and said you be a good girl now. Then he pointed at his friend's backside, and there, in the hazy August heat, was exposed a swath of white behind. Vulgar, I thought, but I smiled anyway, knowing that my father was amused. Sometimes I had forgotten how different we really were; looking at my father was like looking at myself—we'd the same broad shoulders and sturdy limbs, the small blue eyes, the gapped teeth. Years of living together had fused us, my parents and me, until I could hardly free myself, but there were moments when, cruelties played or humors went foul, when my attitude was questioned, when I found myself so alienated by the words my father had spoken or the looks my mother directed toward me that I would crumple, crumble. My identity gone. But then my father's friend hitched up his pants and the laugh was lost and I was left peering upward, into the burning sky.

Inside, my mother was rescuing the fern whose fronds had snapped but had not fallen to the floor. She didn't have to say anything. I knew anger bubbled beneath her floral housedress, her skin. It was only a matter of time, I thought I heard her whisper, everything goes to hell eventually. But

her actions were calm. She moved the pieces of plaster into a pile and placed a bucket directly below the hole to catch any last lazy drips. It was all static, really, my mother there in the living room. We had been expecting the worst for some time, but now that it had happened, the catastrophe wasn't such. The ceiling just gave way to the weight of water and my mother was taking care of it.

She knelt on the floor and with a dishcloth was absorbing the water and wringing it into the bucket beside her. Embarrassed by her vulnerability—her varicosed legs pushing the water to the surface, her bare toes sunken—I suggested she leave it for later. After a few more handfuls of water, she agreed and so we spent the rest of the day watching the soaps and drinking iced tea while my father and his buddy pounded on the roof and came inside sweating and cursing our idleness.

It was decided; the work would begin the following day. That evening we sat on our porch until the mosquitoes arrived. We talked of other things: the neighbor's barking dog, the line of weeds growing in the crack of the driveway. My mother suggested a game of Uno but no one wanted to go in the house to retrieve the cards. We all remarked on the traffic and how busy it was and how loud some of the mufflers were. It was as if nothing much had happened that day and that tomorrow would be more of the same. I relished such languor. I had learnt from my parents that nothing could be corrected without a lot of time. That situations would arrive and the only way to be ready was to let them come. Or maybe it was the heat of the season, that humidity, that prickling sun. During the winter did we wait, and then act? Or did we search the house for parkas and wool socks? Did we keep extra blankets beside our beds? The stretch of days made me forget. My only concern was if we had enough iced tea mix and would I be able to fall asleep if that German shepherd didn't stop its yelping.

The larger issue was that for years my father had ignored my mother. When the stain first appeared, my mother complained to him that it should be fixed. He placated. He went into the attic to check on any leaks. An old dishpan was placed in the rafters. He returned, dust in his hair, and told her that there was nothing to worry about, just forget it. And so she did, for the most part. Occasionally, wanting to start something, she would mention the ceiling. They'd say harsh things. They'd return to their domesticity. Nothing ever changed.

Their days were spent together, watching the same television shows, eating the same roasts, and yet no real words were ever shared. When I returned home after my attempt at creating my own independence, their routine bled onto me and only rarely did I speak true feelings to my parents. We covered over everything. We expressed ourselves through jokes and telephone calls to their other daughter, my married sister. Talking about my sister to my mother, I was able to suggest my thoughts: I did not agree that my sister should give up her job and let her husband take care of everything, I did not think it a good idea that my sister wanted to stop using birth control. In other words, I was saying that no man or child would ever make me happy. In other words, I was trying to tell my mother that she and my father were getting the best they could out of me; I was theirs alone, I needed no one but them. But I couldn't ever say the words. Deep feelings were not a part of our vocabulary. So I used my sister. And my parents never really knew me. It could be called a tragedy, but I suspected this kind of thing happened in most families. Walls were built, and only when they cracked did the light shine through.

It took longer to fix the ceiling than expected. My father's friend bailed after a few hours of above ninety weather and humidity that cloaked. A handyman neighbor was consulted but he was busy with his own projects and the best he could do was suggest some guy from the hardware store who knew all about this kind of work. After a dozen or so calls to his cell phone without an answer, my father gave up and left the problem to my mother. My father's afternoons were then spent drinking cheap beer beneath the shade of our backyard oak. My mother and I were not worried about him, but we did monitor the number of empty cans in the garbage. We settled on four as the daily limit, any more and we would maybe confront him.

So given the responsibility to take care of the situation, my mother called several of her friends before proceeding. Everyone offered advice but none of it was actually helpful. After a few days it didn't even bother us anymore, that hole in the ceiling, that still damp carpeting. Our secret was exposed—with the rush of water came a sort of relief. Finally we no longer had to carefully arrange our lives to hide it. We opened our house to more people in those few days than we had in months. It was something to show, to be amazed by. See where the weakest spot was? Look how you can see the sky from right here. I served iced tea in frosted glasses. My mother would wash and set her hair each night for the next day's company. It was just the little diversion we needed.

Days compounded into a week, and the hole remained. The novelty of it wore thin. We edged around the room, spending our time in the den or our separate bedrooms. It rained again and the bucket caught all leaks. My parents had created a laugh over it. I missed the opportunity to show them that I could be a responsible adult—I should have called a repairman and paid for it myself. Instead, it was my sister who took control.

She announced her pregnancy and wanted to come home for the weekend to celebrate. She knew nothing of our problem and my mother wanted it to stay that way. My parents and I kept our daily activities to ourselves. Or rather, my sister didn't have to concern herself with our troubles. And anyway, wasn't it exciting news about the baby and all? Without asking anyone, my mother opened the phone book and called the first name she found; he said he'd be there early tomorrow.

The contractor and his cadre of men arrived, just as heroic as I thought they would be, able to save. College boys, really, summer help, muscles and tans. I gave up the discipline of my painting to greet them. I tried not to be obvious, but it had been a very long time since that many men had been in our house. My father had escaped to the golf course, and my mother had shopping to do before my sister arrived. Whether intentional or not, my parents had left me alone. Yet to those boys I was as damaged as the ceiling; I was another project to be patched. After admiring them, I slid into the shelter of my bedroom and read an overdue library book.

There was knocking and the hum of a saw. It was two hours before I left my room for a glass of tea. Casually I entered the living room. My mother's ceramic figures were broken; there were dirty boot prints on the carpeting. Two men were preparing a compound and another was sitting on the sofa. They noticed me but did not say anything. I felt all my thirty years. I began to grieve the shattered children; I began to regret my naïve expectations that strangers could be the remedy. I knew they watched me as I left the room—I burned. Someone called out a name, Hank, and stupidly I turned. I should have said something accusatory, something cutting, but my ingrained manners

caught me and I smiled and walked on. Later, my mother asked what had happened to her collection and I told her I didn't know, just that maybe the men hadn't been as careful as they should have been, to which she replied but you were there with them, didn't you watch what they were doing. And when I told her no, that I spent the day reading she sighed and laid it all out. You knew those were important to me. You knew you should have stayed to make sure nothing happened. I called her ridiculous. I called her childish. She started to cry. I left her and couldn't sleep. I blamed all the tea I had but I knew better than to believe that consolation.

Being a child under my parents' roof was easy, I had memorized my role. Being an adult involved a complex, a series of misunderstandings and concessions. When I really faced myself I had no idea why my life had turned out like it had. I had become a scared woman, a woman who couldn't handle herself. And yet I never questioned the poison of my unexpressed emotions, I never thought to break free, to allow myself to breathe. My stain too had once been small.

C. Kubasta

Infidelities

Yellow snapdragons. Five-petaled fallen.
Chicory season. Blue-lilac tender. Wild Carrot
that bloodspattered cuff
that mattered white
that dream of Frost's
wherein nothing terrifies more
than a white spider on a white blossom.
Here: key. mouth. password & username.
Common as ditch lilies
Bluebeard wasn't always a legend. Loosestrife.
Lace is that by which we hang ourselves.

Amy Faith De Betta

A Number of Lives

I grew up at 1202 Union Blvd where only a break in the path separated us from 1204, so the temptation to pick up our Big Wheels and run through the property to out to the street was overwhelming. Only at 1204, Mrs. Nosca resided, a local legend of sorts who never showed her face but existed to sit behind her filthy screen door screaming obscenities and bodily threats at any child who dared step on a blade of her rich green grass. It was common belief that she sat there with a rolodex of everyone's phone numbers. She had a voice that crackled like Tom Waits, only with breasts resting on his knees. When she'd officially lost her mind the house went for sale and my father promptly bought it. It was during this time I became the neighborhood celebrity as I alone could give house tours, leading children into the den of horrors, showing them the sunken chair where she sat her ratty old ass all those years. The toilet, the kitchen... even the bed where she'd slept.

She had a spare room; a converted garage, where she'd abandoned 100 years of treasures, and to a child... these were treasures. Costume jewelry, feathered hats she may have worn when she was a daunting beauty, Little Richard records and postcards from Istanbul. And one summer day, while I was playing in her fortunes, I found a can of paint. Dutch Boy. White. I was... elated. I was going to bring this can home to my father. Present it to him. He would pick it up, he would look at me and I would be his favorite. He would paint the house, the fence, the neighboring homes.... He would make everything clean and sparkling and love me above all else.

But when I proudly walked through the back door and set the rather light can on the kitchen table, he only pushed back his dinner plate, slid the can to my mother, who then quickly put a napkin over her mouth, practically dry heaving into it, and stated, "Get out. Go play outside."

A few days later Mrs. Nosca's daughter pulled into our driveway, came out of her car with tears streaming down her face and took my Dutch Boy paint into her arms. As she pulled away with it, I curled my little hands into fists, enraged. Some 9 years later my sister would tell me that that day I had brought home Mr. Nosca, who was supposed to have been spread at the shore some 40 years prior. It had taken a 5 year-old girl to finally bring Mr. Nosca home.

My father immediately moved his parents into Mrs. Nosca's home and there began the 8 years of my Grandma Anna Bella's protection. It was like being a made-man. All we had to do was just make it across that path to my grandmother's back stoop. She'd hear our Thom McCann Mary Janes picking up speed and emerge out the screen door with a frying pan in her right hand and her left hand extended to grasp us. She was at best 4 foot 8, always in a Sears house coat, hair that strange old-lady-blue hue. Looked like my father in a wig, really. Her house coat was always damp from drying her dish water hands on it and she smelled like Ammens brand powder. She'd divide her time equally between three missions: 1) protecting us from our father. 2) Making my mother's life a living hell by dialing every conceivable relative in Little Italy to claim that her daughter-in-law was trying to

kill her by cooking with salt. 3) Preparing the kind of spumoni that makes even the best ice cream a deep disappointment for the rest of your life. Once around the corner of her wide hips, and into the folds in the back of her dress, we were literally untouchable.

From as early as I can recall, my grandfather was around 80 years old. It was as if he'd never been young. He sat on a faux leather caramel colored recliner taunting my Grandmother unless he was busy putting scraps of meat in the bird bath. It was the strangest thing. But stranger yet was the fact that his loosely interpreted compost turned every robin in the neighborhood into a cannibal. They all grew mysteriously fat and took to squawking like vultures, circling above, waiting for some chicken parmigan or a piece of brochettes.

Now behind his recliner, up on the wall, was the obligatory picture of Pope John Paul. I believe it was actually autographed with best wishes to my Grandmother. One day I asked her why Grandpa, who was very thin with white hair, was wearing that big hat in the photograph. She had apoplexy right there. Next thing you know a Priest was called over to bless me or excommunicate me or something. All I knew was that I had asked a very bad thing and for the next four years I was left to wonder why Grandpa was in the big hat. Ultimately, my sister would inform me that I was a jackass.

Now, being Sicilian, Grandma Anna Bella died at least 9 times. If it was a Tuesday and there was nothing on TV... the spumoni was made... she was bathed, she'd decide she was dying *that* day and would have to be rushed to the hospital. My father barely batted an eye after the fifth time. "She's gassy," he'd say, barely looking up over his newspaper. "She's got heart burn."

So in December of 1995 when she was checked into Brooklyn Presbyterian, only my sister and I would come to visit. After school we'd come by and sit at her bedside listening to her murmur in her sleep. "Mary..." she would say. "Mary. Mary..."

Over the course of those five days she began to honestly look like she was dying. She was so thin it hardly appeared that anyone was lying beneath the hospital white bedspread, but her dry lips still spoke with growing urgency, "Mary.... Mary...."

She'd had so many brothers and sisters, (many of whom had been separated at Ellis Island), that we didn't know for sure if she had a sibling named Mary. This was our "Rosebud." For five days we wept at her bedside, called relatives, interviewed... read every scrap of paper in her house... but couldn't find any mention of a Mary. We wanted nothing more than to find "Mary" and deliver her to the woman who had cherished us for all those years. We brought crucifixes, pictures of the Virgin Mary, even the statue of Mary from her bedroom dresser. All to no avail. "Mary.... Mary...." Again and again she'd wake from her sleep... open her eyes and clearly say, "Mary."

Then on December 31st my sister was sitting at the window and I was putting an extra blanket over Grandma, when she opened her eyes, looked at both of us and yelled, clear and matter of fact, "Mary. Mary...." And after a long pause... "Christmas." Closed her eyes, and died. We had no idea whether to laugh or cry so we did both. Two weeks later my grandfather passed away. She'd taken nine tenths of his heart with her.

Soon after Mr. and Mrs. Emerson moved in. They pulled out the thick rows of tomato plants, opting to plant pot in its place and erected an actual compost. Take into consideration this was long before the public had concern over the ozone or seal clubbing. They were both college professors of

child psychology at some NYC school. In their spare time they hugged trees. They had no television, and had designated play times and regimented “snack time” for their two children, Karen and Michael. The two kids looked unusually like the children in *The Village of the Damned*.

Michael threw tantrums quite regularly and couldn't grasp how to “pretend.” He was no good at playing house, nor cowboys and Indians. Cops and robbers were lost on him. He may have been referencing Mayan ruins at age 6; I had no idea what he was ever talking about. Karen was particularly quiet and her eyes would widen in pure satisfaction when my mom offered her Doritos or cookies. At 4 she was saying things like, “Michael can't come out to play today. He's behaving in that way.”

Mrs. Emerson had a disciplinary plan that involved counting to three before taking action of any sort. When she wanted her children to come home she'd put down the humus and the Lacan, lean out the front door and yell in that nasally voice, “Onnnnnnel!” Some five minutes later, when Karen and Michael were still not responding to her call she'd yell “Twoooooooooo!” By dawn she'd be at “2 and one quarter.” And this would go on. She'd do eighths if she had to. My father said she couldn't even find her way to Third Street. She did, however, teach the whole neighborhood fractions.

At some point Mrs. Emerson decided that Michael was to be a prodigy and bought a second hand up right piano that badly needed tuning. She'd have him practice two hours in the morning, and two hours at night, and I promise you.... Michael was no prodigy. In the summer you could hear his awful attempts bleed out through their porch door, and on a regular occasion you could also hear him flip over tables and chairs. He'd find refuge under the piano bench, curl into a tight ball and say over and over again, “I am not a boy-- I am a piano. I am not a boy-- I am a piano” whilst rocking himself back and forth. Other days it was, “I am not a boy--I am a table-- I am not a boy--I am a table...” He was suspended from the third grade when he bloodied another child's nose, flipped a desk, crawled under his own and announced, “I am not a boy-- I am notebook. I am not a boy-- I am a notebook.” And while it would appear that Michael was winning for most likely to have the extra chromosome, across the street lived my Great Uncle Anthony with his sister, Marian, and her husband Jack.

Uncle Anthony, at the age of seven, had been ice skating with his seven brothers and sisters when the youngest of which, my maternal grandmother, fell through the ice and disappeared into the freezing water. He dove in after her and successfully pushed her out saving her life, but by the time they pulled him out, he was brain damaged and would remain seven years-old for the rest of his life.

The family always told me never to sit on his lap, always to be careful, to be afraid of him, but truthfully, my Uncle Anthony was amazing. All I knew was that he was a kid whom, at 6 foot 4, could reach anything... cookie jars, high branches, the freezer where the ice cream was. He was even strong enough to build forts or open garage doors. I loved him.

He loved his sister Helen best of all, but Aunt Helen was out of her mind from the get go. She served High Balls to me and my sister, in Jim Dandy glasses... alcohol and all. They tasted horrific and on top of that, they had maraschino cherries floating in them. To this day, the thought of eating one makes me gag.

Aunt Helen had a china doll named Lulu, and Lulu was the prettiest most pampered doll in the universe. Aunt Helen made her clothing on a daily basis so she had at least 300 outfits, and if you were really good, and if you washed your hands, she'd let you dress Lulu. I coveted this doll.

When Aunt Helen finally died of crazy, or whatever it was, Uncle Anthony was uncontrollably upset. He wept like a child, confused and angry, and the only thing that would comfort him was my holding his hand. I remember the wall paper in the funeral home, a deep red upholstery back drop infected by a floral design in gold leaf, and I remember climbing up onto the bench before her casket so I could look in and hopefully rescue Lulu. She was not there. And so the mystery began....

At the cemetery it began to rain, but that's the freebee on the bingo card when you bury an Italian. I stood with Uncle Anthony before the casket which was covered in wet red roses. I couldn't care less about the High Ball lady and her after taste of maraschino cherry but I was positive that Lulu was in that casket, about to be lost forever. As the Priest began Psalm 69 (or whatever it was, you'll soon understand why I ceased practicing Catholicism) and 50 shrouded Sicilians began to whale, Uncle Anthony began to hold my hand entirely too tightly.

"Ashes to ashes..." And he turns the crank... Ker-ker-ker-ker as the coffin lowers a bit.

"Dust to dust"... "Ker-ker-ker-ker" as Uncle Anthony's huge hand tightened painfully around mine, squeezing the blood right out of it.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley..."

Ker-ker-ker-ker... And as Uncle Anthony joined the whalers, I was trying to wriggle free of this gigantic hand...

"Of the shadow of death...Ker-ker-ker... "I shall not fear"....

And the coffin is out of sight and the rain is teaming and my retarded uncle Anthony is making no sense... and Lulu has seemingly disappeared forever...

"For the Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want." Ker-ker-ker.... And Uncle Anthony takes a wild leap into the hole, with me attached to him. In a second flat I'm on top of Aunt Helen's casket, kneeling in thorny roses, the sky is some six feet above, as are the faces of 30 horrified onlookers and one shocked Man of the Cloth, and I'm thinking, "Oh! We're looking for Lulu!" And I'm quite all right with this. In case you're wondering, when a five-year-old and a retarded 68 year-old dive into a grave, two thirds of the Sicilians will vote to get the retarded guy out first. Some 10 years later, when Uncle Anthony lay dying in a hospital, he would come out of his sleep, sit straight up, smile and put out his arms as if to hug someone who had come to greet him, before falling back dead, having finally gone home.

Now when there was no one to play with I'd sit out back with my mother who was beautiful. Her hair was a rich lustrous brown and her skin was bone china. She would sit on the cement stoop and cry. I'd pick her myrtle from the woods behind the house, huge bunches and drop half of them on the way back to the stoop. I would say, "I love you... as far as the road leads." And when I asked when she was crying she would say, "Sometimes... mommies just cry." My mother's heart hung from the highest branch of the apple tree in our back yard and I alone knew how sad nearly always felt. For the benefit of onlookers she spent hours gardening marigolds, rose bushes and tulips. To the homely neighborhood women, she was a flower they wanted to cut. To her mother-in-law, she

was Italian, not Sicilian. Mathematically, she was three fourths of her total potential, having, at my father's demand, left her career to make a home for her family.

My father was a strong man. He knew things. My father worked on the Monte Carlo, he built extensions on the house, he dug the cesspool and he had a briefcase of things only he understood. In the fall he'd rake the leaves into a huge burlap bag and yell "Jump on!" to all of us in the street, dragging the bag of leaves and giggling children three blocks to empty it out. He smelled like autumn.

My father worked six days a week and was always looking for side jobs. As kids we thought the shoes just appeared and that Santa could bring anything because my father always pretended that it was that way. I knew him as a potentially very scary man, the exact opposite of my mother with her unending patience and gently voice. But after thirteen hours of work six days a week, Christ himself would've swatted us for screaming at the dinner table. Sitting down to eat my mother's amazing Italian dinners were, after all, his only enjoyment.

The thing about my father was, on rare occasions, he became this hysterically funny man who came up with wild ideas and if he had the time to act of them, the fruitions of those ideas amaze people to date....

This one summer, he called me home from up the block and I thought I was going to be choked to death or something, but instead he excitedly took me out back into my grandma's yard where had an Anderson window laid across two bench horses. He told me that he needed me to go run inside and get my compact mirror, a cosmetic mirror in a gold lame case with a normal mirror on one side, and a magnifying mirror on the other. Now was is a huge thrill already because he needed me, not my older sister, and she got to do all the big jobs like bringing him water or screw drivers or dragging the hose around the house.

So I tore into the house, found it and brought it to him.

"Now I need you to lie down under the window here and you're going to hold that just like I show you. Can you do that?" he asked.

I dove under the window and opened the compact watching as he laid a single silver button on the glass just above my face. Now I'd be lying if I said I knew exactly what he was doing because the August sun was burning my cornea out, but I lay there sweating in the dog-shit grass under the window for a good twenty minutes holding the mirror this way and that way, while my father was clicking away at his 35mm Nikon cracking up at whatever he was seeing saying, "Good... good... oh that's really good... don't move..."

And maybe five weeks later, my Father not only got a check for \$200 from The National Enquirer, but he gave me a twenty dollar bill. At seven, this was more money than I thought existed. Based on the National Children Fund commercials I'd see before the Magical Garden, I thought I could move to Ethiopia and live like a Queen for the rest of my life plus... I didn't even drink coffee. I still have the published photos framed in my basement and to this day, I *still* see the photos of this UFO on alien documentaries. While a hundred thousand Roswell believers are using it as proof of extra-terrestrial life, I'm using it as my proof that my father was a good dad.

Other inventions were not as appreciated. The year that Star Wars came out I wanted nothing

more than to be Princess Leia for Halloween. My father decided it would be far more entertaining for me and my sister (who wanted to be Merlin) to go as R2D2 and C3P0. Now, to this day I don't even know which one was which because, after all, I wanted to be Princess Leia, but the man spent a good four weeks in the basement wearing a welding mask engulfed in flying sparks. When he finally emerged, there they were: two of the most hideous tin and metal constructs two little girls could imagine. One was white and the other gold, but both were battery-powered.

I recall this because he actually duct taped battery packs to our *Member's Only* jackets before suiting us up in these costumes that lit up through fifty blinking mini-light bulbs. I was weighing in around 40 lbs at this time and I wasn't sure that I'd make it around the block, let alone the front steps. Couldn't see a damn thing through the face piece but I can tell you this... I could hear. And by the time we had dragged ourselves to the end of the driveway, I could hear rain. Now, I was very young but I was old enough to know that rain and electricity were not the formula for success. That year, my sister and I completed trick or treating at a marathon pace while Jill Rutter went as Princess Leia.

Jill Rutter, who lived at 1211 Union Street, was my sister's best friend. She had a nose like a sky slope, all the Blondie records, a parakeet, an in-ground swimming pool, a huge birthmark on her ankle, which I deeply envied, and a twin brother named Scott who had hemophilia. All we knew was that what ever happened we were never-never-ever to lay a hand on Scott. Sometimes helicopters flew by to pick him up and race him to the hospital just because he'd skinned a knee.

The Rutters gave Scott everything imaginable from telescopes to an actual go-cart, but they couldn't make him civil. I remember him tearing the wings off gypsy moths and stepping on daddy long legs simply because he could. Scott was not, however, without a sense of irony. Before punching us he'd announce, with great enthusiasm, "Can't punch me back, I'm a hemophiliac!" Some 15 years later my mother would call to tell me he'd died of AIDS at age 25. That's one third of a life time.

Timmy Howard lived at 1303. He taught the neighborhood anatomy, constantly exposing himself and urinating on mail boxes. My father said he was the only actual retard on the block and he may have had something there. When Timmy's dad was seen peeking through the rhododendrons at my mother who was sun bathing in our yard, my father fired off three rounds from a rifle into the shrubs, shredding them and scaring Mr. Howard into hiding for the next ten years.

Timmy's 300-pound mother threw the best birthday parties of all, had ice cream cake and would lay out a huge board for us to dance on. The year *Saturday Night Fever* came out, Timmy decided he was John Travolta and boogied for three hours as the eight track for Night Fever played over and over while we had a peanut hunt, secure in the fact that his penis would be kept in hiding while we searched. Mr. Howard peered out through the blinds of his bedroom but was on the wrong side of the house when I went into the shed to hunt for more peanuts, but found a life size blow up doll instead. Sure, it was not as pretty as Lulu with its mouth contorted into a perfect "O", but I figured my sister's clothing would fit it and potentially make it a bit less absurd. Wasn't this the grand prize?

When I dragged it home and brought it in through the back door, intending to walk it past the dinner table directly to my sister's closet, my father choked on a pork chop and my mother literally

shrieked. Again, my treasure was taken from me and disappeared out the door. Some ten years later my sister would tell me that my father shot a round through Mr. Howard's bedroom window, then one through the doll. Apparently it made a farting noise as it deflated and entertained the hell out of three fourths of the 16 children. The other fourth were scarred for life doomed to forever fear both gun fire and sex toys.

After my grandfather passed away my parents' sold both the houses and though I've gone back to Brooklyn many times, there's been no reason to drive down Union Boulevard since. My sister and I visit our parents every Mary Christmas and while my mother is out doing the decadent floral arrangements for the holiday parties on Fifth Avenue, my father is busy re-inventing the concept of moving lawn ornaments. And for all Mrs. Emerson's time spent leaning out the door, I finally realize it was never a matter of integers. Each one of was more than our sum and total.

Old houses on Union still fill with new children, homes sell as people pass away and the cemetery mourners stand in rain watching as some coffins enclose their loved ones, others just giving them a ride. And just like pi, the stories, the themes, and even the tragedies will repeat but hopefully, so will the jokes.

Jayne Marek

After the Equinox

As the sun one day crosses a line
that has been drawn in everybody's mind,
and dry leaves leap across the ground crust,
their backbones already cracked by frost,
I find the huge bolus of the paper wasps'
nest abandoned by my small enemies.

The lesson here, of course, is that you wait.
The old will to poison with a touch
curls up and drops next to the porch
like a scatter of planed chips. The late
great power that lent so much
purpose to this world on the camellia branch
has failed of breath in October's grip.
Wasp corpses scuff on the stoop. It's time
to sweep away their deaths. When I step out,
broom in hand, the yellow twists take
one last swirl at my feet, but I'm
the stronger now. Watch me, watch me sweep.

The Blind Date

Alden shuddered, stirring his Martini. *A blind date*, he muttered, *how much more fucked up can things get?* This was the first time he was on the market—on sale, really—in almost five years, and it would have been more if Marco, his kid brother, hadn't put an ad in the "Seeking an antidote to my empty life" column in one of the local Vegas papers.

He knew the only reason he went along with everything was his fear that Marco would tell his Mom about his secret conversion to Unitarianism when he was 10. They knew that would kill her. She still thought both her boys were Jewish and eligible. They were neither. Alden tried to do the smile of a confident man infatuated with his life, a man so complete and fulfilled that dating seemed almost wasteful and self-indulgent. He almost pulled it off too.

Bullied by religious blackmail and his mother's weak heart, Alden finally acquiesced to his brother's foul play, agreeing to meet "Carrie" at the Double-Spotted Dalmatian bar and lounge. He got dressed in his one and only suit, a fudge-colored JC Penny deal with pale blue stripes and line-backer shoulder pads sewn into the stitching. To complete his ensemble, he wore a tie with flying mallards on it. Their heads were green like spinach. There could have been little dialogue bubbles coming from their mouths that said "Eat *foie gras*. It's the breakfast of Fat People." Alden looked in the mirror. *Fuck*, he'd said. *I look like a Wide Receiver who shops with gift certificates.*

Alden couldn't believe he was going on a blind date. He was a grown man. Far too old for this shit. Thirty-nine years past the accepted age of urinating in a public swimming pool or flirting with the Singles Dating Scene with all its idiotic rituals and rules: seven minute dating, polyamorous "families," teens for Jesus, macrobiotic potlucks, whatever they hell they were doing now days.

Alden was alone, but he'd accepted it. And he wasn't really alone either, he had his own life which he'd slowly patched together like an antique collector recreating a lost world: he had a flatulent cat named "Bouffi," a deluxe cable package for his distorted TV, a collection of toothpaste boxes from around the world (one that even played music when you opened it up), a tall pile of unopened CD's waiting to be listened to, a group of online friends called the "Wheatabixes," a large, partially-furnished apartment with both bedrooms overlooking a Greek Cemetery and, most importantly, several Ming dynasty statues of women holding trays (for mail, keys and afternoon snacks). Their laughing faces comforted him when he returned home each day. *You're still alive*, their faces declared.

He liked re-heating food in his microwave and staring through his back window at tombstones while he waited. It made him feel like he was cheating death somehow. He was practically living in a Greek necropolis but he wasn't actually a member. He could eat his Mongolian beef in the kitchen, gaze down at tacky flower bouquets and delusional epithets, and then escape the garish culture of death by simply retreating to the study. And Sing and Sung would be waiting in the living room each

and every time to snicker with him. Conning death was no small matter, and who knew better than they? When Ming emperors died, they usually took their entire entourage with to the grave. Sing and Sung were frozen statues: trays in hand, permanent, icy smiles—but at least they weren't dust like their co-workers. Sing, Sung and Alden, therefore, formed a death-defying cooperative. Alden, being the only member with mobility, was a natural leader, secretary and spiritual guardian. How could the mundane world compete with these mortality acrobatics? While everyone else was watching Donald Trump fire unscrupulous interns, Sing, Sung and Alden were busy skirting death. They were almost demi-gods. Almost. Here in the Double-Spotted Dalmatian, Alden was out of his league, a social has-been, a sexual has-never. He was a chump, a chronic masturbator, he was emphysema in a suit. At home, Alden was an Ovidian folk hero, the poster child of hubris, an exiled prince living with his two consorts in a kingdom of objects.

—What the hell am I doing here? He asked himself. Alden began stirring his tongue-numbing cocktail again, wondering why he'd ordered a drink he'd never drunk before. He took a small bite out of one of the olives and spat its sour skin into his hand, disposing of its tough, tasteless texture underneath the booth. He whistled nonchalantly and looked around. Alden paused and looked at his drink once more, trying to see his own reflection in the v-shaped Martini glass. Martinis. Martinis. Why Martinis?

Thirty-five years ago, Alden, Marco and his parents had just finished watching “Muppets on Ice” when the whole family had gone to a nearby Big Time Steakhouse. Alden and his brother grabbed two plastic cups, crammed with chewed, broken-off crayons, two children's mats with games and connect-the-dot still-lives before they followed their parents to the table where the hostess was handing out “adult” menus like a Four Queens Casino dealer specializing in heart attacks, broken dreams and Zirconia smiles. Alden and Marco scribbled away on their menus while their Mom and Dad sat motionless, flipping through the tome of strangely-named meat dishes.

After a few minutes bussing a table, their waiter greeted them, flashing a mouth dressed in silver lines. Alden remembered watching his parents order drinks. His mother had ordered a Tia Maria, he believed. And Marco had asked for a special cup of pickle juice—the only thing he drank in public. He'd ordered a Shirley Temple himself, turning to his father. Dad had hesitated. Curious eyes focused on him. And then, in a voice Alden had never heard before, his father had bellowed out:

—How'bout a nice double Mahhhhtini, hmm? Shaken, not *sturred*?

The waiter nodded. Alden and his mother stared at Dad while Marco drew a pair of magenta breasts on his dinner mat and eyed the single-serving butter tubs.

Alden's Mother had looked at his Dad because she knew he rarely drank. And Alden had looked at him because for the first time, he didn't know who the hell his father was. The voice of *this* man had sounded phony, invented, absurd for a man his size, unnatural for someone his age and above else, 007ish in all the wrong ways.

That terrible impersonation of an English gent, he'd realized years later, was something every man has tried at least once. But usually, you tried it after listening to the BBC all day long or watching E.M. Forester adaptations one weekend with a crimson-cheeked voice major in college who wore thick sweaters with scenes of jumping elk and had a soft spot for Wordsworth and blowing men

on the first date. That voice, that ridiculous fucking voice had no age monopoly, it was something every male tried out once in his dull life just to sound snappy, or upper class, or British, or at least un-American. And the only thing worse than *saying* something in this generically dapper voice, say, in the shower was *hearing* married men busting it out in a Vegas Steakhouse. Men with fake accents were like men who drank Martinis: they were *always* ordering the male power drink, simply because there was nothing left in their fading repertoire, because the halfway-there accent and the Caligulan-green-olive-head-on-a-plastic-spear thing, at least for one cocktail, gave daddyfied men something they lost when they got hitched: distinction and power.

Mom'd looked away. But Alden—the recently converted Unitarian and future half-apotheosis hall-of-famer—sat there in the steakhouse, staring in horror at the voiceover that had come from his father's mouth, rivaling in clumsiness and incongruity the dubbing in a cheap Saturday afternoon Kung Fu flick.

Marco began stealing the tiny Land-O-Lakes butter dispensers. Mom fidgeted. And Alden shook his head.

The drinks had finally arrived and everyone in the family carried on, at least they pretended to. But Alden never forgot that moment. It had changed the way he saw his father, changed the way he watched James Bond movies and revolutionized his view of drinking, accents and marriage.

Alden took a sip of his own martini and then winced. He still didn't like the way they tasted and now he liked even less what they represented. Who needed to be reminded of his age or his life-long frustration with the living world? Somehow, ordering a Martini seemed more corrupt than getting hair plugs or buying a Ferrari—those things required a commitment. But a martini, that was counterfeiting distinction for the sake of imagining power. It didn't even *count* as a mid-life crisis since the evidence was swallowed and the performance absorbed within the body's appetite for identity. As the bitter liquid warmed his stomach, he'd suddenly felt like the most despicable man at the Double-Spotted Dalmatian: an amateur martini-drinker with a self-indicting epiphany. What could be worse? Even his Dad hadn't sunk that low.

Alden stood up to leave, his jacket still buttoned.

A platinum blond woman in a saccharine pink dress stopped in front of him. Her breasts, like a pair of folded arms, pointed accusatively in diagonals.

—Alden? She asked in a bubbly voice.

—Nope. No one here by that name. Try that table over there maybe?

—Oh, I'm so sorry. The woman rushed over to the Maitre D'.

Alden paid for his unfinished drink and took a taxi home. As he watched the street lights pass by, his chest opened up and he exhaled. He knew Sing and Sung would never smile at him now that he'd betrayed the order of material objects, temporarily abandoning their world to commune with people with nervous systems and hearts pumping gory amounts of fresh blood to mistreated limbs. But he could deal with his transgression. He hated suits, small talk, the polite exchange of personal stats and childhood flashbacks. He hated the whole scene, the two-tone laughter, the dramatized interest people showed when they were told about the death of cranky grandparents who had it coming or the tragic disappearance of a fluffy pet rabbit discovered mutilated and gorged by vampires in the

back yard or gene-spliced frogs, discovered under the neighbor's beige van, circled by children who held hands and sung songs of peace. He hated the elaborate series of rituals people went through to protect their dignity before they fucked like field mice. The lamps whizzed by in silent strobes. Alden thought of Starship Galactica. He thought about his mom, the way she pounded her heart with her fist whenever they upset her. He could feel his breath was coming back. Then he had a golden vision of Sing and Sung, holding their trays for him in the foyer, shining like gold bars, like the treasure of Egyptian pharaohs, glistening next to tombs swept clean by wind and piracy. Sing and Sung were his consorts, after all, slaves of the empire, his closest and loyal friends, viceroys of the apartment, obstacles to his solitude. They were faithful, uncompromisingly real. They were loyal, changing only when he wanted them to.

Interlocking Areas

imposed again in sheep's clothing

Scale in the sky at arm's length – almost
& to tote the load & hide side by side
rocks become younger smell the dried summer

extinct relative, pressed flowers & trails –
squashed flat in shale

I think she said to no one in particular:
bull thistle, walrus, this is the man you are
we sleep to escape reptiles & everywhere
besides the single sentence –

the morning rescues a red herring

Saw

March is the crust
but . . .

 some times & occurrences

 firsts & lasts

the same celebrations

 daffodils green river whiffs of spring

it is the size of things & the toughness of things

your elbows over your head

people yearning to be other people

 north & south

 here & over there

need begat love & vice versa how queer

echoes past ear & climax

folds & unfolds in time out of course

 *

a wave of the hand

 (a sort of third of a cross)

a nod

an occasional arm in arm

 (like lovers should)

all walks walking

fur hats furs & precious stones

jewelry & parts of teeth glint in the southeast sun

long hearts & lead shoes

sorrow tends to shuffle along

false spring & high sky take a hand

it is raining somewhere

it is still not here

songs lowly sung till they sound like hummmms

language distilled to the same

uncommon courtesy –

an impossibly fitting gesture

but maybe not a miracle

to my velvet Pope John Paul:

people making peace

Kevin Carrizo di Camillo

The Gradual Calm (#134)

Clear glottis, choir: no victim
of slumber be among your
members. Night hours, named
& numbered, rank as
unfilled blanks in breviary.
Keep brief, then, this
unexegetical exhortation—
blackwatched-plaid clan: Watch!

W/ lifted hands free
from all
anxiety: free for all (not
in body, by Paul) those
who come w/ baked palettes
& tongues wrung saliva-dry.
From tor-top, a benediction
on the choir who wait
more for the Lord than
for daybreak. So, more
for weariness of life, not love
of Thee: bless me. Please.
O, priests & Levites, Elvis
& anchorites—bless & be blessed—
to be continued
in doxology.

Cyndi Vander Ven

31 January 2006: Conjuring Light

Today, I wanted to slip into the skin of an old black woman, stooped with years, wrinkled by hard experience, and remember. Instead, I remained the middle-aged white woman that I am, straining to remember lives I've not lived, trying to separate myself from my own experience. But I can't. Today, the death of a great woman has once again forced to the surface a history I'd rather leave buried, but instead, find the need to recall, its content calling up the echoes of generations: "Never forget." Today, to that end, I bear witness that one more light illuminating our hearts and minds about the oppression of black Americans was extinguished. Mourn, weep the tears of the inconsolable, give yourself over to the sense of loss. Then ring the bells, sound the chorus, shout if you will; Coretta Scott King has left behind the martyr and been reunited with the man.

It was August 28, 1963, and just shy of my 7th birthday, the world was becoming more and more confusing from my child's perspective. My family had just returned from one of our regular visits to southern Alabama, visiting grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, and people with names like relatives, though none could ever be proven such. We were the only members of my clan to actually take up residence in the north—an identity that would forever rob me of a sense of place—too southern to be an insider to northerners, too northern to ever be allowed back into the inner circle of our southern roots again.

I had pondered all the way from Ashford, Alabama, to Indianapolis, Indiana, what I had witnessed during those two weeks. I had seen it all before, but not registered it, too young for social awareness outside the pressure of the sand box. Each warm-weather visit we paid, my Grandpa would snooze after lunch, then rise and take my small hand in his own, resting the other just inside his suspenders, and say, "C'mon, then. Let's go on down to the swimmin' pool."

I remember the heat, the dancing surfaces; it must have been 100 degrees that day with 100 percent humidity. As we walked the ten or twelve blocks to the pool, my flip-flops flap-flapping and the heavy brogues he wore year-round scuffing the scorched pavement, we would pass a few people from town out walking—some to work, some to the "sto'," all moving with no sense of urgency, no sense that we all lived on the leading edge of a great social fault line, the ground underneath us ready to shift. When women passed by, white or black, Grandpa would always tip his old, sweat-stained, grey felt hat. "Hello, Miz Gordon." "Aftnoon, Miz Beacon." Always polite, always pointedly deferent and kind. He could afford such social generosity; though my family had been tenant farmers since the Civil War—my father not even owning shoes until he entered the Navy in WWII—they were still social movers and shakers compared to those who lived in "The Quarter" in Ashford.

I remember so clearly the last day we spent at the public pool. I remember my Grandpa giving me the fifteen cents to get myself a Zero bar from the machine—a daily ritual. As I dropped the

coins into the slot, listening carefully for their metallic tink-tink, just in case I was granted the rare, but wonderful, treat of an accidental refund, I looked past the machine at a sight that was forever burned into memory, a cultural eclipse gazed at for the first time without benefit of protected vision.

A tall cyclone fence with barbed wire at the top ran the perimeter of the public facility. Staring through it were eight or ten black children ranging in age from about four to twelve, clinging to the fence like the nationless refugees we see in the news today. Their little hands or arms alternately grasped or reached through the hot metal, faces pressed against it so longingly that it left an imprint in their foreheads. Most of all, I remember their eyes; they were sad—deep and dark and heavy-lidded, watery. Flies rose and dove at their faces, landed on their various limbs, and waited. I didn't know what they wanted, but I walked to the fence, breaking up my Zero bar among them as I moved down the row, handing it through the fence like a priest placing sacred wafers into the hands of the faithful.

I skipped back to my Grandpa, happy with my act of good will, only to be met by a scorn I couldn't understand. I still don't. It was an ugly moment, the first of many subtle and not-so-subtle prejudices I would encounter in my family as I grew up.

“Hon, you don't give your candy to the little nigga children.”

“Why, Grandpa? Why can't they come in and swim with me?”

“There's no nigras allowed in the pool, honey.”

“But *why*?”

“Just 'cause. That's just the way it is, honey. They ain't like us. They got their place, and we got ours. It's just the way it is. God made it that way, I reckon.”

I was used to the God card. All my life, if my family didn't have any other reason for something, God usually got the blame—or the credit. “God meant...,” “God said...,” “God didn't...,” “God always.” Someone in my family was *always* the heavenly expert, the social theologian. My Grandpa had played the God card, and I knew better than to call his bluff.

Instead, slouching toward Indianapolis, I just pondered it all in my heart, like Mary, an innocent given a burden that seemed too heavy to bear at the time. We arrived home and immediately went about the business of shopping for school supplies and clothes. Life regained its normal footing, and the memory of the little black children's gaze, while not gone, certainly took a backseat to the first day of second grade rapidly approaching. Until, that is, I sat with my parents that evening in late August, watching the evening news on our old Philco television set with its almost-round screen, and heard a man who changed the course of my life, or, more to the point, the cultural course that every member of my family previous to that moment had taken.

I didn't know the occasion for the gathering, but in my child's mind, so many, many people gathered in the summer heat couldn't be a good thing. The speaker was a scary man. He was black, after all. And he had squinty eyes, and a face that stretched and pulled when he spoke or smiled, which seemed rare. But his voice—that voice! Who had the power to resist it? Who could listen to him, regardless of what he was saying, and not be moved? Pulled in by his intensity and kept there by the emotion of his words, I tried to understand what he was saying:

“But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination.”

I didn't need to ask what the “hundred years” referred to; my Great-Grandfather used to pull me onto his lap and regale me with stories about our family's ownership of a “hundred head o' niggahs, not countin' the women and the children.” Oh, I knew about slavery and the glory days of the Old South. Even as a small child, I wondered just what it was that the South missed, just what, exactly, they wanted so badly to return to. Was it the mint juleps on the veranda, or was it the days when you could own other humans and put them to work doing what you didn't have inclination to do? Or was it the mere fact that God had placed white folks on this planet to hold it together with our brand of civility?

I didn't have to know what the term “segregation” meant; even at the age of seven, my social awareness told me that if a black man was talking about feeling crippled and in chains, it meant that he felt as though he were still a slave. I knew, deep in my heart, that what the recipients of my communion nuggets experienced on that sweltering Alabama day was a distinct part of his story. And I knew instinctively when my father sang the praises of Alabama Governor George Wallace and his policies of keeping the negroes in their place, that the place to which he referred was no place I wanted to be, especially if it refused entry to all those children with those sad eyes to a facility labeled, “Public.” All the talk of “blacks this” and “negroes that” made me extremely uncomfortable in my young, white skin.

“This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality.”

I didn't need to know the allusion to *Richard III* to understand being discontent in the sweltering summer I'd just left behind in Alabama, nor did it take much imagination to picture the cool Indiana autumns. Sweltering, hot weather = discontent, non-equal. Cool autumns = freedom, equal. I got it, all right.

“You have been the veterans of creative suffering.”

I recalled stories my father and my uncles told—sometimes with laughter, sometimes with a seriousness borne of the outcome—about The Kolomoki Nine, a vigilante group in my family's area of Alabama that saw it's role as one of decisive punishment or “preventative maintenance” for those who would not follow the proper social constraints. Those stories always frightened me; I could never understand this cruel streak in the men of our family.

“I have a dream that one day, *down* in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification; one day right down in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a *dream* today!”

Now, most of this I could sink my teeth into. Alabama was my State. He was talking about my people. I had a sense of immediacy about those little black boys and black girls joining hands with little white girls like me, like sisters and brothers. I said something to my parents about adopting a

little black child, but they couldn't hear me, attuned as they were to their perception of this man's threat to their world.

By the time that Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in 1968, I had pondered for another five years the social inequities in my world. I had seen Birmingham and Selma on TV, and had heard my uncle's account of the "despicable behavior" of the blacks during the Selma march. But by that time I could call his bluff, and I no longer believed what was so assuredly spoken in my family about racial conflict. The light, for me, was dawning. I had watched a girl need a police escort just to go to college. I had seen the peaceful demonstrations by a peaceful people hosed down by those committed to serve and protect, the marchers tossed about like chaff in the wind. I knew. I knew.

I remember vividly that night in 1968 when the icon of that movement, the pillar of the crumbling roof of justice, was taken from his people, from all of us, at the peak of his moment. He had known his sense of place, but it was one more thing stolen from him. And I remember Coretta Scott King, so proud, the hands of her small children held tightly in her own, standing by his casket with an air of resignation, or perhaps expectation, even, but certainly not one of defeat. Her head was held high, and through the ensuing 38 years has continued to be held high, chin jutting at just the right angle as to be firm, not belligerent; sure, not haughty. She didn't strive with the movement after that; she went about her life quietly, determinedly, raising her family, fielding questions and interviews, mourning alone for a man mourned publicly by the world that claimed him.

Today, on the occasion of her death at the age of 78, I had to stop long enough to conjure her light, to contemplate and confirm her life. My words to a fellow teacher who sent the announcement to us today were that she represents the true end of an era, a reminder of hope lost. Lost, that is, unless we all choose to pick up the baton dropped so unwillingly this morning, and run the race set before us so long ago. Here, on the evening of Coretta's death, on the eve of Black History Month, I am reminded that it is my family's backward look at a past that never was glorious, and the King family's forward look to a future that could truly be glorious, that has grounded my missing sense of place. Their legacy is why I teach at a high school with diversity, where I have become the minority. It is why I bristle when I hear our black students refer to each other as "nigga," and all things negative or ridiculous referred to as "gay." It is why I detest the friction between the various Hispanic populations in my hallways. The Kings, along with many before and after them, have paid too high a price for freedom to tolerate language smacking of hate and prejudice. Rather, to us, and to our students, I say, "Let freedom ring."

"And when this happens, when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual,

Free at last, free at last.

Thank *God* Almighty, we are free at last."

Enjoy your reunion, Coretta.

Marcela Sulak

Platitudes at Sea

1.

If the horizon marks the place
beyond which we can neither see
nor imagine, and you
a dark dot in the middle
or perhaps in the upper left-hand corner
wearing shoes, or barefoot
with the shoes in your hand,
having just removed them
to walk in the sand, or having
just decided to put them on,
do you look up, or out, or
not at all, or in?

*I like being here.
It makes me feel
as if I were
somewhere else.*

2.

After her lover tells her he is being forced
to move to a different country, perhaps
in forty-three days, he asks her
what the weather is like where she is.

3.

Maybe something's
there, and maybe it isn't. It's the form
emptiness spills over,
the rim of you,
everything--
the shoreline, the distance, the footprints--
elastic with longing.

*I keep forgetting
how to walk
on this kind of water.*

4.
A pair of parenthesis:
the space cupped by the right
awaiting death.

*Does a swimmer
think of it that way,
cheeks wide with air?*

5.
Freight is the promise
of delivery--a way to live
for now, between what isn't had
and what isn't wanted.
All these affectionate,
mutable waves.

6.
Ships that pass in the night
leave imperceptibly long wakes.

*Let's not blame
the metaphor,
but real men
with strong imaginations
and questionable characters.
The flesh willing
but the spirit weak.*

7.
Mistakenly believing
Indianola Bay
to be the Bay of New Orleans
La Salle docked on the marsh grass.
A town sprang up
in the long eye
of an intermittent hurricane.

Three times storms took out the town.
Three times they nailed the houses up again.
But the third time they marked each board
with a number, according to its position,
then dismembered everything,
loaded it up and drove inland,
where they reunited board to board,
house to house, and barn to barn.

They named the new town Cuero.
And skin covers bone.
And sun covers skin.

8.
You will offer me a flat, empty palm
and a starched green shoulder.
I won't know who pressed it.

I will lay my fingers down
stepping back as you move forward.

9.
Insistence without desire
desire without direction
direction without insistence,
so moves the sand crab
in quick, eccentric rings.

10.
Let us praise Braque,
who discovered a tactile space in nature,
who tried to paint the sensation
of moving around objects,
the feeling
 of the terrain,
the distances between things:

*Why does everyone ask, yes,
but are you willing to die
for it? Kill for it?
Why don't they ask,
are you willing to live in it?*

*Things that were never
meant to be,
Oh what I am going to
do with you now?*

*Beneath, a thin string,
above, clouds.
The wind arrives
from all directions at once.
I don't know,
and I don't know
which way to be blown.*

11.

A plain is not so gripping,
that's why it's called a plain.

When a plain meets the sky, you
may be walking on the beach,

still you may be
the blemish on a horizon that won't ripen,

holding the place
from which one lifts

momentarily given,
momentarily borne and borne again,

and given, and given away, and mercifully,
utterly, and yes, let it be

nothing, let it be
at last.

Jeff Roessner

Visitation

Broken peace
settles like dust
over our still, foggy morning
tuned with this cracked
two-noted wail.

Like an old English
metaphor of life's brevity,
the mourning dove sings
through the window—
into and out of this room—

then rouses
to gushing gray
blurred unsteady flight
as the boy, weekendening
with his father,
bursts through the frame
into the garden's startled light.

He reaches for air,
wants traction to run
on the dove's empty path.

Inside we'll sit
watching—as if for days,
as though waiting
for the first red welling
on sliced skin,

thankful no single wound
is fatal, knowing we'll die
with these and the scars
of a thousand other cuts.

Traveler, Out of Season

A cold September rattles the glass
with its fist of lake wind.

Outside, gray light scatters
and I can just now see the red crest
of the shuddering maple.

Everything wants to be noticed here,
calls out in its newness—
even in this familiar bed,
placed awkwardly in the room,
even with Christy next to me
firmly wound into the sheets
like a bolt wrenched into its socket.

I've been awake for days
dreaming of sleep. All night
the fruit moon sang in the sky.
It's not a moon for travelers,
they say, not one for beginnings.
Still, I'm in its tow, tuned
to its light, rolling toward
some distant shore.

Later, I'll stumble over tables,
continuing the search for shoes, a watch.
I'll cinch myself together
with a tie, and leave my wife here
to pad through unboxed rooms.
I imagine her taking her temperature,
studying the chart on the calendar,
waiting for the first slight sign
that life has begun—
a new migrant setting out
on its own traveling season.

Tim Chilcote is a first-year MFA student in prose. He is currently trying to write a really good short story. He hopes to write a novel someday.

Kevin Hattrup is a first year MFA in poetry from idyllic Maple Glen, PA. He is currently working on a haiku musical, tentatively titled, "Basho Must Go On."

Renée E. D'Aoust's essay "Graham Crackers" won an AWP "Intro to Journals" 2005 nonfiction award, and her book *Body of a Dancer* is based on her years as a professional dancer in NYC. She is the recipient of the Julie Harris Award for Emerging Playwrights and a finalist for the New Letters 2005 essay awards. Publications include *Brevity*, *Canoe & Kayak Magazine*, *Kalliope*, *Mid-American Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Permafrost*, *13th Moon*, *Touchstone*, and *Under the Sun*. D'Aoust attends the University of Notre Dame's M.F.A. program on a Nicholas Sparks Fellowship.

Tony D'Souza was born in Chicago in 1974. From 2000-2003 he served as a rural Aids educator with the Peace Corps in Ivory Coast and Madagascar. His award-winning fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in *The New Yorker*, *Playboy*, *Stand*, *Tin House*, *McSweeney's*, *Subtropics*, *Prospect*, *The Literary Review*, *The Black Warrior Review*, *Imago*, and elsewhere. He's contributed poetry, non-fiction and criticism to such venues as *Esquire*, *WorldView*, *The Fiddlehead*, *Nimrod*, *The Notre Dame Review*, *The Hollins Critic*, *Zembla*, *Amazon.com* and others. He was awarded a 2006 US National Endowment for the Arts fellowship in prose, and in 2000, was chosen by Writers of the Americas as one of seven young fiction writers to represent the US at the first US-Cuba writers' conference since the Revolution, held in Havana. His novel, *Whiteman*, due from Harcourt USA in April, Portobello UK in July 2006, and *Pax of Norway*, has been heralded by the Wall Street Journal as 'one of the most anticipated novels' of the year, and will be mentioned or reviewed in *People Magazine*, *The New York Times Review of Books*, *Vanity Fair*, *Poets&Writers*, *Outside Magazine*, and *Entertainment Weekly*.

Kathleen J. Canavan worked as a medical journalist in Washington, DC, before coming to Notre Dame to earn her MFA. She now serves as executive editor to the *Notre Dame Review*, and lives in South Bend with her husband and daughter.

John Crawford (MFA, '01) is a freelance writer whose home is Philadelphia, for now. This summer he's marrying a smart, pretty and liberal-leaning woman who's dragging him to New England, away from soft pretzels, water ice and cheesesteaks.

Kevin Ducey finished his MFA in 2004. He now lives in Madison, Wisconsin. His kitchen window looks out over Lake Monona. At this moment he's considering lunch, you?

Cyndy Searfoss is a 1995 graduate of the Creative Writing Program. She fell in love with horses, flying and going fast at a very early age. A fan of the adrenaline rush, she's still a tad too reckless, a trait she has passed along to her two sons. She's currently the Director of Alumni Affairs at IU South Bend.

Sarah Bowman and Mark Matson live in Chicago. Their son, Niall, was born in November 2005. Sarah is a tenure track instructor of English at Wright College, one of the City Colleges of Chicago.

Chris Gerben (MFA '03) has called areas of Michigan, Indiana, New York, and California home over the past four years. This year, however, he will be saying goodbye to his one true hometown, Riverview, MI. He'll miss the sounds of crickets, trains, and air conditioners clicking on during long summer nights.

D.A. Sumrall was born 9.3.76. He received his MFA in Poetry from University of Notre Dame in 2003. Currently, he lives in New Haven, CT and teaches composition at Manchester Community College just outside Hartford. He can be reached at daniel_sumrall@yahoo.com.

Dawn M. Comer earned her MFA in 1998. Having moved to Defiance, Ohio, in 2005, she is taking a break from teaching and now spends most of her time hanging out with her son Elliot. For her own sanity, Dawn does manage to sneak off in the early morning hours to write, working hard to finish her collection of tourist trap stories before another year rolls around.

Lynne Chien was made in Taiwan and did most of her growing up in Sacramento, California and Vancouver, British Columbia. She loves the Vancouver Canucks and the sound of gravel crunching under her feet. She has openly embraced the biting cold winters of South Bend and is a complete sucker for tailgating and Fighting Irish football.

William McGee, Jr. is a '93 graduate of the Creative Writing Program at Notre Dame. He had a story published in *NDR #7* and currently teaches both middle school language arts and college English composition. He lives in Illinois with his wife and daughters.

Danna Ephland, teaching artist and late bloomer, was born in Buffalo, NY, educated at York University, Toronto and 25 years later is finishing up an MFA at the University of Notre Dame. She left her heart in Berkeley, and her youth in Chicago, currently finds herself happily settled near Lake Michigan. Her poems have appeared in *Rhino*, *Permafrost*, *Indiana Review* and in *Folio*, where she was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Two of her poems were recent finalists in *Indiana Review's* 1/2K Contest. A collaborative poem with Paulette Beete is forthcoming in *Saints of Hysteria*, an anthology of collaborative work by Soft Skull Press.

NoNieqa L. Ramos received her MFA and MEd from the University of Notre Dame. She is a middle school teacher and vice-principal in San Antonio, Texas.

Amy Wray Irish, MFA 1998, has been published in *Ariel*, *100 Words*, *River King Poetry Supplement*, *Dánta* and *Wazeejournal.org*. Her recognitions include 1st place in Chicago's Hirshfield Memorial Poetry Contest. Her novel-in-progress, co-written with her husband, won honorable mention in the Rocky Mountain Fiction Writer's Colorado Gold contest.

Michael Richards graduated from the writing program in 2002. His short fiction has appeared in numerous periodicals including the *Notre Dame Review*, the *Sagebrush Review*, the *Southeast Review*, the *Pecan Grove Review*, *MARY*, and *Quirk Magazine*. His debut collection of stories, *Floating Midnight*, was published by River Lily Press in 2005. Currently, he teaches at the University of Texas at San Antonio.

Amy Reese, ND MFA 2001, purveyor of odd jobs, just got a new siamese kitten and is currently on hiatus following completion of an MSIS in Librarianship from the University of Texas.

Colby Davis is a poet from the small town of Grayling, Michigan where she learned to love fresh water and jack pines. She received her B.A. from Adrian College and is currently working towards an M.F.A. from the University of Notre Dame.

Sara Swanson received her MFA in 2003 and was the Nicholas Sparks writer-in-residence. Her short story, "A Smooth Patch," published in the December 2005 issue of *Arkansas Review*, was nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

C. Kubasta writes & lives in Oshkosh Wisconsin. She teaches at Marian College, a small Catholic liberal arts college. Despite her tenure at Notre Dame, and her current employment, she remains a good atheist.

Right after graduation Amy Faith DeBetta became the CEO for a chain of computer schools on the east coast. 9-11. Her closest friends were killed. She and the rest of those who were not walked 6 and half hours over the Washington Bridge trying to get out of the city. She went to memorial after memorial, but there were no bodies. A few weeks later she was seated at her leather chair in her front office at the mahogany desk with the four lap tops... the secretary that loathed her... and she finally woke up. So she stood up and she got in the car and drove. She got tired in Albuquerque, New Mexico, so she got a 6 month lease at an apartment complex... six months turned into almost three years and she's never gone home. She works as the Merchandising Specialist for the Victoria's Secret Catalogue company. She reports to the buyers and is responsible to sites in tokyo, france... ohio... It's a job. Not a career. She lost her interest in money and prestige some time ago and hopes to never regain it. She had to bury the most heroic people she'd ever known to get a clue as to how short this life is. She's unmarried, no kids... She has a pet dingo and still collects rare tarantulas. Nothing is more important to her than her family and most nights you can find her at the Guild theatre watching ninja flicks and laughing. Finally happy again.

Jayne Marek teaches literature, film, and writing courses at Franklin College, but maintains a secret identity as writer of poems, stories, and plays. A short comedy, "The Mighty Will," premieres as part of the "April Foolishness" short-play festival in Indianapolis in Spring 2006.

Jackson Bliss (MFA 07') is learning to speak Red State after Chicago, The Pacific Northwest and 15 years spent drinking smoothies in little California surfer towns. Currently he's working on a novel about double lives, bi-culturalism and identity. This summer he plans on spending time with his girlfriend in the Q and traveling to Paris where he hopes to commit suicide on chocolate croissants.

Kevin Carrizo di Camillo '95 MA is Editor and Diaconal Coordinator at Paulist Press/HiddenSpring Books. His most recent poems have appeared in *Prairie Fire*, *Daedalus*, *National Poetry Review*, and *James Joyce Quarterly*. His latest book of poetry is *Occasionally Yours (& Others)* (Typographeum, 1999), and with Lawrence Boadt he edited *John Paul II in the Holy Land* (Stimulus, 2005). He is

an aspirant to the Order of Deacons in the Latin Church and lives with his wife Alicia in New Jersey where he continues a three year battle with testicular cancer. Along with classmate Jere Odell he founded and edited *The Rhubarbarian*, the precursor of *The Bend*.

Cyndi Vander Ven is attempting to teach Language Arts, Yearbook and Literary Magazine in a school of 3,000 disadvantaged high schoolers in Atlanta. When she is not using de Saussure to interpret gang signs, Freud to dispel aggression in her classroom knife fights, or Derrida to interpret what must surely be pre-deconstructed essays written by her seniors, she is once again picking up the pen and attempting to write a novel about a Southern theologian in Rome. Italy, not Georgia. She welcomes all Northerners to visit her in Atlanta; the only prerequisite is sanity.

Marcela Sulak's poetry has most recently appeared in *Fence*, *The Indiana Review*, *The Notre Dame Review*, *Quarterly West*, *River Styx*, and *Spoon River Poetry Review*, among others. She has translated Karel Hynek Macha's romantic poem "May" from the Czech (Twisted Spoon Press, 2005), and the Congolese Mutombo Nkulu-N'Sengha's "Bela-Wenda" from the French. She is an Assistant Professor of Literature at The American University, where she teaches comparative world poetry and translation.

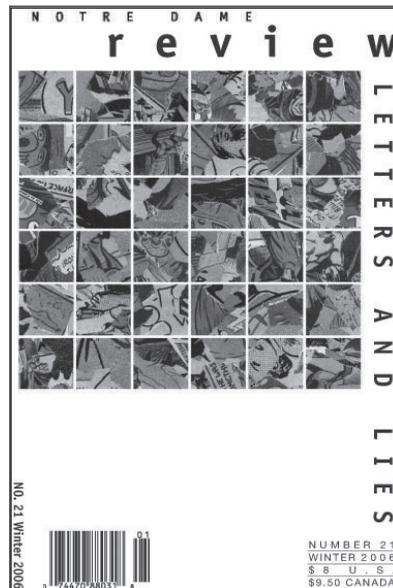
Jeffrey Roessner is chair of the English department at Mercyhurst College in Erie, Pennsylvania. His interests include cultural studies, contemporary British historical fiction, and creative writing. He has published essays on works by John Fowles, Angela Carter, Jeanette Winterson, and the Beatles, among others. A longtime music fan and musician, he has recently had a book manuscript on creative songwriting accepted by music publisher Mel Bay. He lives in Erie with his wife and two daughters.

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