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We see how brokenly
how warily
how ill

our blind gestures
parodied
what God really wanted

(some simple thing).
The thought of it
(this simple thing)

— Ann Carson

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Silhouette

Jesse Goolsby

We rolled down a stretch of back road in a scoop of autumn farmland, just Mom and me, flanked by the checkered grassy lowlands and almond trees echoing in neat rows to sight's end. She eyed the yellow grass that flashed by, waist deep, just off the edge of the road. Mom had been a runner, but a car crash had decapitated her mother and smashed most of the organs my mother needed to live actively. Now, four months after her last transplant and legally blind, her pale fingers gripped the wheel as I scanned for animals in the roadway. Even at thirteen I understood the joy in her eyes darting to the fields and back to me paying half attention to her confession: her dream of running through the fields out of breath until her legs gave out, the desire to feel her connected body at work.

The early evening sun reflected off her bloated face and backlit the blonde whiskers she'd grown soon after she began the anti-rejection drugs for her new kidneys. I could tell she was embarrassed, and I secretly wondered if she would shave one day when it became unbearable. Would she let my Dad do it or would she wait until she was alone? I imagined her in their cramped bathroom, lifting her chin in the mirror light and working the sharp blade down her jaw line, across her neck.

Mom pressed the car stereo power button, joining a Whitney Houston ballad. Mom sung in tune, but annoyingly loud. "Please," I demanded and asked at the same time, covering my ears in disgust. She heard me well enough, but sang louder, pushing me with her smooth alto. She turned to face me, to sing right at me, but all I could see were the whiskers, thick enough now to extend partway down her upper lip. I stared at her puffed cheeks as she belted away, perfectly off in thirds and fifths, her mouth smaller than ever, unleashing the same tuned voice that named me.

And the next moment, in what materializes as a dream, she swerved the car to the narrow shoulder and slammed to a stop. The driver's side hung in the roadway as mom jerked her door open and exited with a groan. The music played. She didn't limp as she rounded the front end and paused, just for a second, balancing, gazing out upon the edge of the yellow field. Her thin white blouse waved in a silent breeze and without so much as a nod she spastically lunged forward in a jump step down the dusty embankment. Her deteriorating legs weren't prepared and her right shoulder dipped suddenly, leading her fall.

And I, seat belted, watched my mother collapse as Whitney reached up and stroked the top of her vocal register, holding and fluttering the climaxed note alone.

In our house, above the antique piano, hung a black and white photo of mom in a high school track meet. The frame says "Darcy: 1973." It's just her and the backstretch silhouetted by sycamore trees and sky. Her mouth is in contorted agony, thin arms splayed open to the sides, and her feet, perfectly timed, float. And though you can't hear it, you can tell she's gasping, full throttle, for more.

AND THEN MY AS WE SAY HEART WAS WATERBOARDED

satnrose

I met up with her where the night slides into loneliness where she did dance in the park balleting and was gone with the dawn and I was as always looking for her and I got up to a place where I did not know my own name and then she who did not know that she was a lesson said in my imperfect memory "I the me the remainder of loving and I the me who does not know and I the me searching for where there is rejoicing to find the key to which my lock which is me for the sake of the release as it turns and all of I the me the thing which is supposed to be I the me because there was a monstrous thing done to I the me to train me in the method to teach me all that is entirely in me all the time and drill me in the necessity of I the me with a promise made to not fear" and in order to try to simply understand the blunt fact that I was a better person with her than without and the truth that anything that leads to an epiphany is good but I was captured and taken down to a room far away from the battlefield of the uncivil war between the sexes and then my as we say heart was waterboarded bit by bit until I gave up all of the most awful secrets even those I didn't think I had

Blank Masterpiece

martin steele

After noon the dank studio takes on a radiant aura; it is the time when Michael the artist sees best. There is an old oak easel before him, fragile and well used. The multi colored paints on his palette appear dull to him. He sees his subject well but only now and then. He was resisting painting portraits but the governor of the local art school asked him to do Colonel Flounders portrait for posterity. The job will take three months and he wasn't even sure if he could complete the task. The cataracts in his eyes flowed slowly now covering his corneas like a blanket of grey snow. The shawl he wore around his shoulders as a gift from a former pupil who when he complained that the studio was cold and damp felt the shawl was a good remedy. The portrait appeared to be going well. He saw the long legs of the Colonel encased in red striped trousers. The ash tray nearby blinked unceremoniously erratically, still he felt the legs stood out well. The next day he thought he saw the arms akimbo and painted them as he imagined. The tall canvas took shape but he could not ascertain how far he had gone. The Colonel wanted a peek but this was taboo to Michael. Must be unseen before completion, he felt. The Colonel said you got your deposit, can't I see my tuppence worth? The studio rapidly darkened every day now. His eyes saw flashing starlights. He painted what he felt was the Sam Browne well polished. The eyes could sparkle more, the lips redder and the moustache more waxier. The second month his eyes only perceived blurs but he continued the portrait careful to cover the canvas with a cloth sheet after each sitting. The third month gave him pains and trauma. His hands shook and the paint from the brushes ran to the floor. His spotted shoes glowed with greens and browns. The Colonel smiled. He knew the portrait must be nearly completed. A toast to you tonight he yelled out. On the last day Michael was not seeing anything but from instinct held the brush firmly and with an effervescent flourish signed his name very near the bottom of the canvas.

The portrait hangs in the Royal Academy much admired by modern scholars and old art critics. The lights reflects brightly back from the completely blank canvas and the Colonel swears he sees something of himself thereon.

She Who Invites

Kathleen Hellen

Izanami stands on a wooden bridge. Her long black hair is in a knot. Her red kimono dances with the pattern of the carp. She dips a bamboo spear into the mirror of the water and the universe begins. Dragon flies and skimmers. Fishes into frogs into birds on slender wings. A fox steps out, leaving paw-prints in the path that foxes take. A wolf. Six white horses. A family of monkeys. Izanami stirs the waters of the world. She invites.

The illusion of eternal purity the stream possessed, its music and the greenery of its banks, reminded Sears of pictures he had seen of paradise. The sacred grove was no legitimate part of his thinking, but the whiteness of falling water, the variety of its sounds, the serenity of the pools he saw corresponded to a memory as deep as any he possessed. He had on his knees in countless cavernous and ill-ventilated Episcopal churches praised the beginning of things. He had heard this described in Revelation as a sea of crystal and living creatures filled with eyes, but it seemed that he had never believed it to be anything but a fountainhead.

— John Cheever, *Oh What A Paradise It Seems*

make the distance

Cade Collum

i put an old shirt and a box of matches
in the seat of the car and left last night.

besides, somewhere
there's a withering town or a cool bay or
a pile of leaves
where things
might be.
and who was it
that said *people learn*
from their own stupidity?

tonight, i see trees gripping bare pulpits.
i see cotton sprouts cutting teeth.

at the ocean

Cade Collum

we've passed through the last winding turnstile
before this vast & curious body.

we keep seeing the shore rinsing its mouth
with the foam that is our present tense.

there's nothing after this. we are watchmen,
propped in the tower as the light bends

and stills against
that brief shadow of whatever we were.

Chrysalis

Gabor G Gyukics

A diabolically consolidated wasp's nest with a
Woman as its resilient keeper was found in the
Same woman's vertebrae during autopsy,
The coroner seemed bathetic as he turgidly
Drew his initials on the side of the nest
In the rancid spine line to ensure his first right
To this bouncing discovery.

The woman's puffed up face showed aversion
Regarding the intrusion into her cagey body,
She was inclined to diminish the coroner's derogatory
Invasion for she had been nurturing these
Ferocious inhabitants of her nest with
Complimentary attention, with
Utter persuasion to let them maintain their
Own proliferation by overlooking
Flowers in dewy cemeteries,
Jiving tactile grave diggers as the primary goal of existence.

Now, at present the woman's bony shell
Is laid out in the morgue, with the
Abandoned nest inside her waiting for the
Final taxidermy.

The Colour of Blue

Allanah Hunt

The room did not compliment her beauty. It was a sea of white. White walls, white beds, white sheets, even white floors. It wasn't a pretty white like fresh, powdery snow or the soft white of an owl's down feathers. It was a dreary white like a blank sheet of paper. No, the room was ugly unlike my daughter. With her dark chocolate hair and cherry lips, she reminded me of a red rose in a garden of thorns. Her delicate face showed no signs of pain but I knew better. Her breathing was uneasy and her eyelids were slightly open to only reveal the whites of her baby blue eyes. Her skin was a deathly pale.

I watched her sadly as she slept on. She was far too young to be trapped in a hospital bed. She should have been outside feeling the cool breeze's loving kiss on her face instead of lying in an uncomfortable hospital bed for months in pain.

I gently rubbed her cheek. 'Sleep soundly, my beautiful Anna,' I whispered softly. 'Daddy's here to watch over you.'

I laid a bouquet of Anna's favourite flowers, blue tulips, on her bedside table. As I quietly sat down on the chair next to her bed, Anna's eyes flickered open.

'Daddy,' a smile like sunshine appeared on her face.

'Hello, sweetie,' I leaned over and kissed her forehead. 'Are you feeling any better today?'

'I still can't feel my legs, Daddy,' Anna said sadly as she pointed weakly at her legs.

I smiled, trying to hide my pain. 'I know, sweetie. Remember the doctors said you might not feel your legs for a long time.'

'How long?' Anna asked.

I swallowed. 'Quite a long time, Anna.'

Not seeming worried at my answer, she looked around the room as though looking for something.

'Where's Mummy?' she asked suddenly. 'She hasn't been here all the times you've come to see me.'

I swallowed again, trying to get rid of the lump in my throat. 'I'm sorry, Anna, but Mummy couldn't come today either.'

Anna looked disappointed but didn't push the matter any further. She yawned tiredly and closed her eyes. The effort was too much for her to keep them open.

I sighed as I watched her go back to sleep. I buried my head into my hands and felt something wet roll down my cheek.

The doctors said it was for the best. They said I couldn't tell her in her present condition. But what I wanted to know was how was I ever going to tell my seven-year-old daughter that the car accident that had made her a paraplegic had also killed her mother.

A lonely figure sat in a wheelchair on our back deck. Her sad blue eyes watched the cloudy sky as she clutched a long, blue, summer dress that had belonged to her mother.

I watched Anna out of the clear glass door. It tore at my heart to see my little daughter in so much grief. It was as if she was slowly drowning in a dark blue sea of depression. As she went further and further down, I failed to pull her back to surface for a breath of fresh air.

Taking a deep breath, I pulled the sliding door open and walked out onto the back deck, the cold wind pulling at my clothes. I sat down beside Anna, who hadn't moved.

'What are you doing out here, sweetie?' I asked.

Anna shrugged as she continued to cradle her mother's dress. I watched her silently, wishing I could say something, anything, to make my little girl smile again. I reached over and stroked my wife's dress, trying to hold back the memories it brought to me of my beautiful partner.

'It's a pretty dress, isn't it, sweetie?'

Anna nodded, not looking up at me.

'You really like it, don't you?'

Anna nodded again, but remained silent.

'You know, when you're older and much bigger, you could wear it?'

Anna's eyes widened and she finally made eye contact with me, her face full of hope. 'Could I really?' she almost whispered.

I smiled softly. 'Of course you could.'

I saw a smile start to form on her lips but it suddenly dropped.

'But this is Mummy's dress,' Anna stared at it sadly.

'But I know Mummy would want you to wear it when you're older,' I said, hoping I could bring back the smile I had just seen a glimpse of.

Anna frowned. 'How do you know?' she asked.

'Anna, there are some things I just know. I know your mum would love you to wear that dress one day.'

My daughter cocked her head at me curiously. 'If you know that, then would you know other stuff?' she said, a slight tone of hope in her voice.

'Like what?' I queried.

'Like...' Anna paused, as if unsure whether to carry on.

'Go on, Anna,' I encouraged her.

'Like if Mummy is happy where she is,' Anna gazed at me with sad blue eyes and I saw tears rolling down her face. 'She is happy, isn't she, Daddy?'

I felt tears start to well up in my eyes but I held them back. If Anna saw me cry, it would upset her even more.

I reached over and lifted Anna out of her wheelchair, her mother's dress still in her arms. I cradled her in my arms.

‘That is one thing I definitely do know, sweetie,’ I said as I kissed her cheek and wiped away a tear from her eyes. ‘She is happy where she is.’

Anna’s bottom lip wobbled. ‘Without me?’

My heart ached at her words. ‘No, sweetie, it isn’t like that,’ I explained, weighing out my words carefully. ‘It’s just that Mummy knows that for you to be happy, she has to be happy. She would hate to see you so sad.’

Anna sniffled and wiped her eyes. ‘You mean, if I was happy, Mummy would be even happier?’

‘That’s right,’ I said.

Anna went quiet. She began examining her mother’s dress again.

‘You know,’ I began, ‘I bet when you get old enough to wear Mummy’s dress, you will look exactly like Mummy.’

This time, a smile like summer rain washed over Anna’s face and her eyes glowed with happiness. She threw her arms around me and squeezed as tight as she could.

‘I love you, Daddy,’ Anna said, as she buried her head into my shoulder.

I smiled as I held her close to me and laid my hand on the back of her head. My wife’s dress was in between the both of us. It felt as though I was holding her in my arms as well as my beloved daughter.

‘I love you too, sweetie,’ I whispered, ‘I love you too.’

I got up from my chair, still holding Anna. I carried her inside our house. I took Anna upstairs to her bedroom that was painted a pretty blue, not a dreary white. I planned to put her to bed so she could drift into a beautiful place of peace and dream of her mum happy in Heaven.

Grey Apples, Sugar Milk, Waiting

Jasmon Drain

Mr. Morgan's wife gets ready for work early as well. At six. She wasn't expected to be there until nine thirty. They talked less and less as the days went on, didn't ask one another if they'd eaten, and slept strategically in unusual areas of the house. She lay in the bathroom with a comforter because she said cold tile floors matched her. He slept in the basement, next to the speakers with a stereo tuned to AM radio, drinking chocolate milk. Each took unconscious turns at watching television in the living room, always tuned to CNN or some local station's news, volume high, and waiting. They were waiting to see something that would make them feel better.

Because, in their family's state all colors are faded.

They remain grey like tornado clouds and shift tight red or brown only when getting ready for work. Work was routine, at least it used to be for Mr. Morgan, therefore, it could be considered grey also. The color grey was safe and getting to it on a consistent basis was the goal. It made things hurt less.

One morning after a long rest, he stood up in bed and wrapped his fingers around the silver switch of the overhead bulb, then took a short breath. The bulb was only forty watts – changed a week or so previous – which made the room dim as though photos were being developed. He pushed the door closed where there was a long mirror that extended from top to bottom. He stared at himself. The skin of his face was choppy from remaining stiff on one side of the bed, his eyes were filled with blood and saggy, and there were patches of hair because he had not shaved in seven days.

And he hadn't been to work in longer. There would be nothing much to do there anyway. He was a tall, overweight father, a dark black man, who sat at a desk. When working he typed some galactic calculation of words per minute, drank chocolate milk instead of coffee, but still put sugar in it (for energy), and waited for a call or message he'd never receive. Assignments piled on his desk in large stacks and he held his head in his hands three hours at a time. One hour break for lunch in which he used the bathroom, took a breath, and drank another cup of chocolate sugar milk.

But everyone at work understood. They simply dropped assignments off with an, "I'm sorry to hear about things," or "Is there anything we can do to help," or better yet, "You should take some time off because you deserve it." He wondered continuously why people say "sorry" to things they forget the minute you are out of their sight.

So, Mr. Morgan took the time off. Eight days: long, hungry, television watched and consistently tuned to CNN, not for the war coverage, instead, for war *coverage*. He only wanted the specifics.

The news normally covers tragic and cheerful events in our world as though they affect no one and everyone simultaneously, as if they're passing moments in time everyone should be honored to have experienced during their lives. Iran-Contra and Roger Clemen's strikeout record were equal. Neil Armstrong and Christa McAuliffe were as well.

Waiting those eight days in front of the television frustrated him. He decided to follow his wife and head back to work. She woke at six, he at six-twenty five. This was perfect timing because they wouldn't have to cross one another. He'd brush his teeth as she ate cereal; she'd comb her hair while he ironed shirts. Her lipstick was applied in the car; his necktie adjusted alone in the basement. He'd then grab a briefcase containing no important papers that rested on the side of the stereo. By that time, his wife would be gone. In their routine they'd become unconsciously angry at one another. There was no one else to blame. It had gotten so bad in less than two weeks that she didn't even say goodbye before leaving anymore. The moment the door lock clicked, Mr. Morgan would stand in the basement hallway, adjusting a collar and tie that didn't matter, and cry, cry, cry. Not because his wife was leaving, instead, he knew she was coming back minus the excitement once held for late night dinners, for talking, for older-folk cuddling. She'd be back empty, filled with the same desire to see the letters of a name she chose twenty-one years ago given some respect. Mr. Morgan hated the clicking sound of the door anyway. Metal on metal made his teeth hurt.

He would then race up the stairs, look from the peephole after she pulled away, grab an apple that had been in the refrigerator so long it was brown, and head to the couch. It usually was around eight-thirty by then. If he didn't leave at that moment, he'd be late for work. They weren't expecting him though. And he sat there, slumped over, shirt terribly ironed with the corner of his collar flipped upward and revealing small portions of his tie. Mr. Morgan was waiting, just as his wife had been before him.

Then he heard something from the television that caught his attention. It remained on twenty-four hours a day. He pushed the briefcase to the side of the couch, bit the apple like it was popcorn at a good movie, and focused intently.

The announcer was a white man with a smooth tan, who had enough mustache to cover his top and bottom lips equally. He wore a green shirt and held his voice in an octave that sounded straining:

"Eleven Iraqi citizens and three American soldiers were killed in another bombing just outside of Baghdad. This looks to have been another terrorist act perpetuated by members of the extremist party. Many other civilians were injured in the blast. A car was reportedly driven into the middle of a busy residential street and exploded from a bomb placed inside its trunk. There is no word yet as to how many civilians were injured total. We will give a full report at eight."

Mr. Morgan thought about how the announcer didn't care about those people, not even enough to think of their families – American or otherwise – or the charred and burned red skin of injured victims.

Each day Mr. Morgan did a similar thing: take a shower with the water somewhat warm, not wash under his arms because it required energy he reserved to grab an apple, and travel past the television as though it weren't there. It managed to consistently snatch his attention and bring him back to the couch. He'd watch his wife leave from the peephole, sob, fix his tie, waste enough time to make him late, walk to the refrigerator, sit down, bite in. The same reporter with the controlled octave and detached perspective told related stories. Even after reporting for a second time about a fuel tanker exploding at a gas station, a blast which killed eighty civilians, the reporter maintained his insularity.

Today Mr. Morgan's apple was softer and a browner red. His left fist remained balled. Long enough he'd waited with no results. It was not going to happen. Everyday this was the routine: Wait. The white text of letters on the bottom of the screen read the Dow Jones report, Michael Jackson's trial status, Brittany Spears' hair shaving, steroids in baseball, tomorrow's weather, more troops deployed. And as the announcer continued talking, Mr. Morgan walked back to the front door.

They would never give his situation special attention. His family was not special. She was his little girl, a wannabe soldier since the age of seventeen, with short hair, reddish brown skin like his apples, boy shoulders and a formerly delicate pair of eyes. She was deployed two years ago. Initially, his daughter was a member of the reserves, only accepting duty because it offered security and an opportunity to take better care of herself later. Mr. Morgan said *no*, he'd dip into his retirement fund if need be. But the daughter explained how black men barely had anything for retirement as it was. She would not take her father's.

He couldn't forget how excited she became about serving in Iraq, serving the country that gave her a chance at freedom. She was told how things weren't so bad there.

That was the beginning of the family's dwindling conversations.

The volume of the television was still relatively high as Mr. Morgan stood at the front door, peering out at his car. By then he was deaf. Although the television was loud, in his home it was as quiet as church during prayer.

"Going to work will take my mind off things," he said aloud. He stepped outside slowly, and threw the apple core into the grass, watching it roll toward the street. Mr. Morgan opened the door and sat in the driver's seat. There was a small carton of spoiled chocolate milk in the cup holder to his right, a picture of his daughter in the armrest compartment, three un-smoked cigarettes in the clean ashtray, and a radio always tuned to the AM news station. The cry he released in the house took twenty pounds from him. And going to work on this day may just make him feel better.

As Mr. Morgan began backing from the driveway, cars passed going in each direction. They were all different shades of blues and oranges and greens, which all eventually added up to grey. He started the car, put his foot to the brake, shifted the vehicle into reverse. A large fuel tanker sped by and he watched it closely through the mirror. It was silver, shiny from the sun's reflection, with a jet-black grill. Surely this was the same make and model the bomber taped some infinite amount of explosives to which killed his daughter. Mr. Morgan turned up the radio, opening his ears wide to the speaker. He began waiting again, as his wife did in her own way on the trip to work, and they both did in disparate rooms of the house, without meals, without conversation, without their daughter.

So he looked forward to a new carton of chocolate milk at work, seasoned syrupy with extra sugar, forward to the desk with mountains of paper. He almost anticipated his hands resting along his face in those three-hour intervals, to the lunch break he really never took, to hearing the *I'm sorrys* and, *I hope you feel better soon*s. He now desired the absence of his wife's voice over the volume of televisions and radios. Those things were all he had now. Because in the end, no matter how long they waited and waited and waited, they'd never hear anything again anyway.

tonight as i returned from the grocery store, i sat down on the sidewalk outside my apartment, and in the false light i made a picture. i used the dry summer leaves and the purple violets and a found piece of toilette paper. i made a face and with the wet stalk of the flowers i painted shadows and tears on it.

i felt like a child sitting there in my grey pajama pants, on that sidewalk. i had not bothered to dress properly to go to the store for cigarettes. i examined the textures and the colours and the veins of the leaves. i touched a cigarette butt in the brown gutter. and when it was all done, i was sad i could not take it with me and i wondered if anyone would notice that little thing i had made on the sidewalk.

i do not know what i shall do tomorrow. in the morning the streetcleaner will come and wash it all away, like perhaps the waves, or the rain, or even death itself. and i fear that one day a giant will wash me away, before
i can ever write a story or truly love a woman.

— Joe Balay

DEVOUR: A Love Story

Stacey Bryan

I used to be a beige thing, soft and round. Gibbered at menstrual pain raking its fleshy fingers through my abdomen in the middle of the night. Nibbled my cud with my family, a placid girl-cow blinking in the subdued light of dinner hour.

Nowadays I gorge on color and excrete air, exuding an aura of shimmering chroma. To foster this fantastical facade, I am not allowed anymore to ever remain still. You might observe me haunting the horizon, figure on a blazing bike, streaking toward the rising sun. I wake with the ghosts, shadow the undead who do not speak to me. Always early, early, cold and dark. I would scandalize roosters, astonish Tibetan monks, with my hours. Nevertheless, I drag myself from my cozy girl's bed, out of my warm girl's room, heave myself out into the unfriendly dark of L.A.'s San Fernando Valley.

Doing the distance is tantamount, something which proves amazingly difficult to accomplish on a schoolgirl's schedule, as I must appear in class by 9 AM, poised to harpoon the white whale, keen to wrestle x and y. But before that comes the sweat, the thudding heart, the aching calves. Nothing less than 20 miles will do, and more is better. Why do I do this? Because I have to have to do this. The further I ride, the more it demands, the louder my answer, the stronger I grow. The stronger I grow, the louder my answer, the more it demands, the further I ride, and so on, in a clean and perfect circle. Echoing that is the Valley, an interminable basin surrounded by muscular hills and some actual mountains and in the end nothing but a desert. So early in the morning, I freeze and ride and ride and freeze. The monks would smile, and be proud. Later on, during the day, we will all broil.

The first look happened the day after I turned 17. To say a look changed my life would be almost true, but not quite true. I will try to recall the order of events. It was nine months ago, it was a beautiful day, my limbs were full and elastic, the world was elastic and full. I wandered into a music store on Laurel Canyon, the part of Laurel that's down in North Hollywood, not the pretty part that goes up into the muscular hills. I don't know why that's important except that the stretch of sidewalk the music store is on is sort of wild, unkempt, raw. No trees, no flowers, no extras. And that's how I thought of him when I saw him for the first time: wild, unkempt, raw. It was a breezy day many months ago, many pounds ago. As I walked into the store, a whiff of grease on the wind from the neighboring Micky D's caused painful saliva to shoot into my mouth, my stomach to clench with unimaginable force. The ferocity of it stunned me. Picture Mike Tyson tossing a playful blow to your midsection, catching you unawares. That's what it felt like. Because I hadn't eaten all day. Because I felt that my thighs were fat. Because I had just turned 17.

The guy in the store reminded me of a windy hill, a wild horse, a different universe

from the skinny acned boys I went to school with. He was tall, tall, jet black hair down to his shoulders, a feral look in his eyes, booming baritone laugh squeezing from his lungs. I froze just inside the door and then forced myself to move so I didn't look crazy. Not that anyone would have cared, not with all the bongs for sale and the piercing room in back. After a few moments of veiled observation, I surmised that he was the manager. He incongruously wore a button down shirt rolled up past the elbows, revealing some mysterious and demure design on his inner forearm. I loved him. I loved him. Bewilderment rolled up one side, revelation down the other, and I trembled with golden love. Or was that hunger? Whatever the feeling was, hunger seared it to perfection and then jammed it, still sizzling, through my navel, straight into my seething innards.

He was at least 10 years older, and I was jailbait. But that meant nothing to me. Simple Clintonian principles would easily apply here: don't ask, don't tell. Problem solved. Until, mischievously, a few months later, I could reveal my secret to him just to see the expression on his face. *Hey, by the way, I'm not actually 19. I'm a senior in high school.* Possibly eliciting anger. But more likely mild bemused surprise, considering his environment, the bongs and the tattoos, the silver rods punched daily through people's noses and navels. But that would never happen. He could have grabbed me, denuded me down to my girlish underwear, hauled me along the aisle into the piercing room. He could have tied me up in the back for days, and I would never have betrayed him to a soul. If he had been a vampire, he wouldn't even have to ask, or touch me, or tilt my head to the side. I would just close my eyes and wait for his deadly teeth to graze my neck.

True, I hadn't dressed as if the opera awaited me for my foray into this messy place, but I thought I looked pretty good, whimsical pony tail and all. I suppose not everyone shared this belief. I suppose I was buried beneath the beige so completely that my very visibility was in question. Or perhaps I just looked like a little girl. So what was the order of events, exactly? It was a hideous day, my limbs were not *full*, they were *fat*, the world was not elastic. And I was about to get it. The first look. When I could get my palsied limbs to move again, horror upon delight upon horror, I found myself suddenly squeezing past him in an aisle. He was right there, squeezing past, 'cause the aisles were narrow and old 'cause it was an old, smelly music store, and he smiled absently, eyes focused above my head, looking somewhere across the room, not even at me, a non-look, and then worse, he spoke, but all he said was "Sorry," politely and kept going, nothing more, and down I sank, down and down I sank, through the ratty old '70s linoleum, through the concrete, into the earth, into the molten mantle.

If I hadn't received the look or, more specifically, the non-look, it's possible that stalking would have become my activity of choice. Find out where he lived. Follow him around. Because the sudden love burned so hot, the rejection hotter still. But I had already

started down that unlit road, turned that sharp corner that, let's face it, monks and roosters (in particular) never had to confront: the last year in high school, the last year as a child, the lunatic college scramble, or worse, masses of us lined up like Rockettes, kicking and twirling, vying for the same job. The roosters pecked and strutted, the monks filled their bowls with rice. But what would I do, what could I do? How would a spotty knowledge of Geometry, the history of Rome, the pitiful curled-up fingers of dead frogs help me now?

I wanted to believe that the world was elastic and full, my release from high school a signal of impending freedom. For most this painted Pollock-like fantasies of the bright and random halcyon days ahead of parties, college, drinking, sex. But for me, loyal daughter, rule follower, suddenly the future lay like the sandy bottom of a deep, deep ocean that stretched out ceaselessly in every direction while the weight of the entire sea pressed down upon my vulnerable spine. Some nameless terror squeezed in hard on all sides, a giant fist intent on killing. I had to do something, somehow hoist my ponderous body from bed, stem the treacherous fear. It started as an innocent diet, a turning inward toward something already established, already there; the future, the world, was unknowable, the world, myself, unreachable, unknowable. But my body was terra firma, and I lay hold of it with a villain's grip, scheming and planning its complete surrender.

Sometimes while steering my Schwinn through my arduous Valley expeditions, I ride by the music store. It's always too early for anyone to be around, not even pedestrians tip-toeing past that wild stretch of sidewalk, too early for anyone to need music. Someone made this rule up; someone decided this. But I beg to differ. What about the roosters, what about the monks? Because they are awake already, inhaling the deep silence. Like eating 2,000 calories a day, three meals a day, five little meals all day long. Who made up these rules? With those rules chubby asses and chubby thighs would gain a despotic hold on all the world, not just America. As it is, their sole purpose in life is to either remain as they are, satisfied, or like Manifest Destiny, expand, increase the territory, regardless of the consequences. Therefore they demand constant attention, like naughty children. I stepped into a new universe, heedlessly leaving friends and family behind. There, I must always be moving, and consumption was relegated to absolute need. I no longer nibbled politely from my fork. I gobbled, I gorged, I devoured. When it was time to do such things. Otherwise, like the holy men on the frozen mountain, I partook sparingly, if at all, convinced that if there was a God, he would gaze beneficently down upon my actions, impressed, in spite of himself, by my diligent self-restraint.

I have gone very far these days. Farther than you are willing to go. If you were curious to join me, you would have to do these things: discard your forks and knives, abandon weeping in the night, ditch your suburban cud. Your fingers will do to shove any

amount or type of sustenance into that dark hole, the doorway to your inner temple. Whipped cream, peanut butter, crackers, grapes. Conversely, ironically, but in the spirit of Green, those same fingers will be used to aid in sustenance's return, a gentle thrust to the back of the throat usually sufficing. Remember your schooling, remember your stomach acids. They will ruin Daddy's plumbing. So sometimes you must spew your dinner or snacks into glass jars or Tupperware (glass is better, as Tupperware is more difficult to clean out and tends to hold the odor) and then stealthily dispose of the vile sloshing contents somewhere in the backyard. You will thank God, in a hypocritically convenient moment of faith, that the family's schnauzer died years ago.

I have crossed a boundary. Let's take a leap and say you will not follow. Though the lush green lawns of my suburban childhood, the lack of worry or strife may appeal to some, to those who never had it, I sometimes imagine it as a perennial latte dream woven by the hostess of banality herself, none other than the sorceress of the San Fernando Valley. Forgotten, overlooked, or denied by all, she yet existed, quilting and quilting her gigantic balmy spell which she tenderly and ceaselessly tucked down around us, luring us to sleep, to follow rules, to consume hot chocolate. To not get up at 4 in the morning. To not ride our bikes for 20 miles. So you will remain where you are, where I once was, and you will not follow.

Though no one could have prepared me for the molten lava of the earth's inner core, that bright agony, the cooking of my outer shell, was like an unexpected courtesy from the cosmos, accelerating the steady destruction of that dull, stale varnish, specialty of the sorceress. She would never venture anywhere near the inner core. Her indifferent nature would balk at such unbearable temperatures even if, in the end, she became transformed. Little by little, the chroma emerged, oxidizing bulk, streamlining muscle, depleting menstruation. Admittedly, I do miss my body ridding itself of that unnecessary liquid, that ridiculous blood. These days it reabsorbs it, hoards it for its own fruitless purpose. But whatever that purpose may be, it won't stop me. That boundary. I have crossed that boundary.

This might be where too far begins. But I don't care. I quiver with exhaustion yet remain pinned together by lack of regret. Where is your friction, stuffed way down into the musty cushions of your sofa, sucked atom by atom into the computer, the mall, the deadening rhythm of a rut with no discerning edges? You know who sits with you, softly whittling and whittling at those corners, making them rounder, softer, inviting. My nerve endings vibrate because suffering is a labyrinth whose winding corners and darkened tunnels I navigate with artistic precision and biased devotion. If you stumbled into those same meandering trails, the world would startle at your heart-rending screams. I would have to gently take your hand and lead you out. There is blood on my grinning teeth while yours slowly stain brown from the tepid tea you sip while perusing the newspaper for sales.

The Second Look

I bumped into him at the supermarket, months later, running an errand for my mom. Months after watering the Valley with my sodden, salty pores, after Coke and cake, sausage and strudel had long since passed into the realm of the mythical. I was leaving as he came in, he of the tallness, the black black hair. I did a double-take. But so did he. I, because I knew him, he, because he did not know me. I thought, strangely, this is what a car crash must feel like, this frozen, almost calm observation of events while your brain snapped images in bite-sized chunks of information that it could assimilate in seconds flat: eyes, mouth, teeth. Because there were only teeth, mouth, eyes during that slow motion moment, all his, lips slightly parted, teeth showing, head tilted downward toward me and eyes boring into mine. About to say something? About to speak? About to touch me. About to stop me. The baby fat was gone, face and arms tanned almost mocha by the sun, but three months wasn't that long ago. I didn't look *that* different. So I imagine the piercing gaze must have x-rayed its way past the shapeless clothes, tangled hair hanging down, to something else, something else. A curving inward but arching outward at the same time, a paradoxical lessening while expanding, an autonomous new energy that negated comment or advice; my own raw, my own wild. I felt him wanting to mix his with mine, measure degrees of potency, see what happened. The grocery store doors hissed shut as we passed one another, closing him within. The glass barrier sparkled like rock candy in the sun.

How familiar I'd become with that experience, those moments of distilled absorption, and how gratified I was to share that with him, the most clandestine and intimate of sensations, because I didn't know how else, where else that would ever happen except there, then. I realized that the hot, golden love of before was gone, and I missed it, oh, I missed it, but I was no longer weak and I was much less frightened, and so aching ardor's replacement by the sharp tang of validation, the sweet and buttery sense of satisfaction, was a thousand times more powerful, twin goliaths in whose shadows all else moldered.

These days as I approach the threshold of legality, my 18th birthday, I have all but stopped the clock, annihilated puberty, repudiated the natural order. Who do you know who can do that except time travelers, fakirs, astronauts, perhaps? I am shrinking, I am contracting, I am my own black hole. Annoyingly, familial concern has begun to throttle up these days. Their salty tears, the rich emotion are so delicious, difficult to ignore, sometimes guiltting me into accepting a handful of grapes, acquiescing to a few swallows of cherry Gatorade. I recognize their terror of the black hole; why wouldn't they be horrified over what it must be like, being pulled electron by electron into gummy human taffy for endless eons of seemingly protracted death? I can't blame them for their single-minded point of view; after all, it used to be mine. I used to see the cup as half-empty, used to see the black hole as endless death. But a black hole

can be seen, in fact, as endless life because, once inside it, it would actually take an eternity to die.

Anyway, what would they have me do, be like them? Stop my tango with luminous, terrifying, precarious life in exchange for what, the pulpy world of morning eggs, love handles, compliance and resignation? Too late for that, too late. I don't do Ballroom anymore. I press the rose between my lips, let the thorns do their damage. That crunching beneath your feet is my dutiful girlhood, that heady odor in the air my fear vomited down and down into the loamy earth. As for the man in the music store, I haven't seen him again since the second look. But we may meet again still. Who knows? Once I lay siege to the jaded sorceress, undermining her plague of jejune lawns and cookie-cutter daughters, the curse lifted from me. I rose on a dark, dark morning while all were sleeping and stumbled upon her by accident, astonished to discover that she was atrophied and weak, easily overcome, and had not acted out of malice toward anyone but only out of deadly boredom, simply attempting to fill the Valley's unfillable space.

In my view, space is not a bad thing. Space is the non-ness that allows other things to be possible. Quiet space is what the monks seek, questing and questing inside themselves for that elusive mastery, that recognition of something more. Space makes way for bones, and bones are always there, buttressed up against my soul, hard and evident, powerful levees against the mundane and unknown alike. My fingers tap the ribcage like a harp, rub up and down the lean, firm arm like a violin. I'm an accomplished musician—did I not tell you that? You may not enjoy the music, but it will definitely get your attention. I coax the bones up from deep below, sharpen them into shiny points while I shriek and tear and claw and devour. All doubts vanish in a whirlwind of concupiscent grazing, grinding, kneading; a self-scrutiny elevated to self-exaltation.

Why do I do this? Because I have to have to have to have to have to have to do this. Because she wants me to be a beige thing, soft and round. If I am moving, moving, nothing keeps up, nothing holds on. It all falters and tumbles in my wake. I know this is not the usual way. I know there are other ways. I'm willing. I'm open. Show me your version of the unbearable jagged wincing cheek biting howling jig along the building's ledge that makes you love the world a little bit more once the anguish eases. Love yourself a little bit more the longer you can endure it. And thus engaged, hold all else at bay. But until then, I will not be denied this. Because in the marrow of my bones it sings.

In my sleep at night it plucks lovingly at my lashes.

Night, and a woman in labor wails in the leprosarium; her fingers are gone and she cannot grip tight, but only hangs, leprous, pregnant with pain; one last gasp signals the tearing of the bulbed head down hard against the membranes; fluid from one wounded body, a child, smooth seed from the ravaged husk, brought among the drums and into the night of this cursed community; out of its freakish crust the world exudes the novelty of perfect form.

— *Leper Colony: A Diary Entry*, Paul Theroux

from *The Excavation of Light at the Wedding*

Rebecca Mertz

what makes up things is empty space. it happens

when you adjust your vision. let's say,

the girl in

the yellow dress. is she the intricate observer,

particles observing particles or the woman

with the fountain in her hands?

we don't move back and forth in time time is just

the record of everything moving around us. the time

stenographer is on crack. you write it and

erase it

and write it and erase it. what we have taken in from the

environment

the cross-section of a miniseries,

a light story

the relationships between the nerves is called
identity. do you want to get married with
or without
seraphs? please just interrupt the thought
process that produces the
chemical response in the body. strip
your nerve cells of
their power: she wanted a new ending
but this isn't a string of cds reflecting sun
light the television is always in the
background and she isn't you isn't she isn't

I would start at the beginning if I knew where the beginning was, but I do not know for sure. I only suspect that it all starts with the first deep wound, and after that, like a person who limps or cradles their withered arm close to their side, we favor the place where the knife went in.

Each of us carries with us an inner knowledge about the way we have been and will be betrayed; so there are those who believe we make it happen out of our unrest. But maybe it is simply that great needs cause great fears, and great fears keep us needful long into the night. I do not know the answers, I only know that it happens for more than one would wish and that many people remain pilgrims and never come to peace.

Where is he among us who dares speak of love, who dares speak of giving, of compassion, of that arc of feeling that flung out into the world can be followed back into one's self.

. . .

And does it really grow through fission and multiply with use, and disappear and dry up when one sends it not? And is it true that all those who husband and hoard and save their compassion only for themselves find themselves without it when they need it most?

I know the answer to this and so, of course, do you. But what I cannot answer and wish you would tell me is why, if we know that compassion is an energy force which flows between all the world's creatures, do we guard it so. And why, if the problem is not getting it but releasing it, do we dam the flow?

The world is dying for lack of compassion. It is the food of life, so everyone must give what they can.

Whatever the question, love is the answer, yet somehow there is never enough. But there could be as much as we need and then some. You just need to give yourself.

— Merle Shain, *Hearts that We Broke Long Ago*

Bridal
Allan Kaplan

feline
finger-
tips
lick
soft skin

our hearts'
drumming
duo
on
taut skin

oh supple
rhythms,
you
got
supple skin

our bed's
genius
loci
is
close skin

by Sarah Rehfeldt

The Awakening

Almost gradually it shifts
as it lengthens us
our bodies.

Snowfall

lovely lashes
fresh beginnings
quickly now – she catches fast the earth.

On Love

I held onto one butterfly
and watched.
Nothing happened.

You held onto one butterfly
and let it dance.
Something whispered.
It soared above the trees
and landed.

“On Love” previously published in www.ascentaspirations.ca

You kiss a beautiful mouth, and a key
Turns in the lock of your fear.

A spoken sentence sharpens to a fine edge.

— Rumi

Homesick Tree Riesener

It's his house. Murmuring that he knows best, he's the one who knows about stuff like that, she lets him choose the sprawling glass structure on a sunny hill, the roofs covered with solar collectors for the heat that floods his home.

Never a need for the back-up system. If the day is overcast, warmth radiates from massive black storage columns filled with heat-soaked rocks. In the atrium, huge trees rooted in cunningly contrived underground streams thrust their greedy branches up to the glass two stories overhead.

hanging baskets and the potted things on the deep windowsills coming together like Every window burgeons with growth, the e green stalactites and stalagmites growing into column-like plants.

The human and the plant inhabitants flourish in the rich, nourishing air but even in the middle of the winter night, she slips outside to gulp in chilled breaths not so life-sustaining. Inside, he follows drafts and apologetically closes the windows she leaves open.

Their partnership doggedly sustains mismatches. They shift constantly to connect, try hard to head vaguely in the same direction, smile with worried eyes. Except for his uneasiness with her, he lives content, working at the computer that links him to a distant overseer, no clothing but shorts, his smooth, seal-like body as near nature as possible.

"I wish we'd had this house when the kids were little," he says longingly. "They'd have loved the Jacuzzi. Remember how we used to take them in the tub with us? We could have all got in the Jacuzzi. I miss the time when they all ran around naked."

He shadow-boxes, an iPod tuned to his favorite talk show, and steals worried looks at her. She sits on the big soft couch barricaded by piles of books, odd quarterlies, notebooks of various colors, shapes and sizes in which she records dreams, overheard subway conversations, journals of herself writing as animals, old ladies, children, the lone survivor of nuclear holocaust, insects.

She thinks of the continuing physical existence of all the dead. In the elaborate tomb of Elizabeth I, the queen supinely resplendent in ruff and jewels, there might still be bones, fragments of the brilliance-filled skull that refused to let the body continue. Inside, there would be, at least, dust, Elizabeth's molecules. She could fill a crystal vial, put it on a gold chain, wear it around her neck. Fill the geode on her desk, dabble her fingers in it. Put a pinch in a casserole, together with garlic, rosemary, saffron, if

only she could reach the dust of Elizabeth. Cannibal, she thinks, and he offers a penny for her thoughts.

"Just thinking about something good for dinner tonight, that's all."

She passes for one of them in the life-filled house, posts notes from Greenpeace on the refrigerator, takes a mild interest in his bottles of wine, zones the house with scent from Tibetan incense, lavender soap, drawers filled with the vanilla scent of Tonka beans, camouflage.

She writes in one of her notebooks. *The priests extracted the organs, put them in canopic jars. Then the bodies were stuffed with rich scented spices and preservatives before they were wrapped in cool, fine linen.* She bathes in lily-scented water, rubs fragrant creams into her skin and lies still under crisp sheets, imagines the total darkness of the bedroom unbroken for five thousand years, sleeps a safe and dreamless sleep.

She has always had to speak their language, eat their food. Cups of rich dark cocoa, thick with cream, in indigo mugs that trap the heat. Crisp buttery toast cut into triangles, crusted with crunchy, crystalline sugar, dusted with cinnamon, seductive and tempting, causing her almost to forget her own people and their language, sometimes for weeks, months almost, especially when she is little and unfree, for she is one of those who find their way early.

Then she wears pink plastic glasses perched barely on her nose, pushed up fifty times a day with a small knobby forefinger. Her teachers know her for a very good little girl, and she turns in neat homework, colors in the lines, spills no glue. From summer camp, she sends her parents a letter.

"I am exactly how you think I am."

When she is grown and married, her family never guess, seeing her brisk and vigorous about the house, putting up new rattan shelves in places they wouldn't have thought of but which afterward they didn't know how they had done without, filling the fridge with food she cooks on the weekends and recombines into appetizers, soups, main courses, casseroles so cleverly you'd never guess it was the same stuff, coordinating everyone's moods and needs yet respecting their individuality, staging pleasant family affairs for them to remember, they never guess what she knows.

She knows it was once so cold in Siberia that unborn calves froze in their mothers' When the children are wombs.

Young, she works for a temp agency. At one of the jobs, a boss, after reading a book on management techniques, brings in a facilitator and they all practice understanding

one another.

"On one of the slips, write what kind of an animal you see yourself as," says the facilitator, a tall masqued blonde whose scarf is tied in an impossibly complicated knot. "On another slip, write what kind of animal you see the person next to you as."

On the slip about herself, she writes, "A gaunt, snarling wolf at bay." Her neighbor calls her, "A cheerful, busy little squirrel."

She believes in signs, knows angels work as checkout girls, makes decisions according to chance remarks from strangers. When she reads the wanted ad, a job so clearly right for her, she thinks it may be a message. Are there others then, a sort of aliens' club, who gather in obscure, shabby coffeehouses to drink iced water and read newspapers written in an archaic alphabet, where from day to day, familiar habitués do not arrive and the others notice empty chairs with shy proud smiles, like parents who realize their ugly duckling has found courage to star in the school ballet.

The timing seems skewed. Her nest isn't empty; still, she can work part-time, begin her preparation for re-entry, have a cup with her name on the coffeehouse shelf.

She carries the tiny slip of paper, awkwardly phrased, off-putting, until it gets soft and fuzzy from a week in her pocket. Finally, she puts the little strip on her desk, pushes the buttons and sends a summons, reading the ad as she waits.

Is there an actual person at the other end of the long thin wire that stretches out for miles, overhead and underground, connecting them like Theseus and Ariadne's cord in the Minotaur's labyrinth, from her overheated home to a rented room in a cheap part of town, where a watcher keeps vigil through dingy lace curtains, peering at the night sky for UFOs, in a room of six-foot high tunnels through twenty years' accumulation of yellowed newspapers, a room full of cats who will one day be scooped up in a van and carried off to death, a place where she would be if he didn't keep her in his house, where she stays because it is easier than sleeping on the streets, squatting in abandoned tenements.

"I don't know why you had to go and get a job like that," he says. "I don't think it's even legal. I don't think you should tell the kids."

"They're practically grown-up now."

"It's morbid."

"I don't think so. Not admitting it, that's the morbid part. Like your mother, reading those books where everything is always great, everyone is always happy. It's not real."

"You go too far the other way. You wallow in pain."

"That's not true. I always try to make things happy here. I'm cheerful for you."

"Well, that's the way it should be. Look, the sun is shining. Put out your hand, feel the warmth. Look around you. Sunshine, living things bursting with life."

"That's not so. Our bodies long for death, jump into it at the least opportunity, fall prey to opportunistic infections, plunge down stairs. We bribe them with vitamins and fat-free diets."

"I don't give a god-damn. Just keep your dying away from me."

He buys a stationary cross-country skiing machine and puts it in a corner of the dining room. The rowing machine goes behind the breakfast table. The bicycle to nowhere is in the upstairs bathroom. Moving steps go endlessly up and down on the sunporch.

Three hundred channels come in on a cable. He watches ocean voyages as he rows, Amsterdam canals when he bicycles. The stock of DVDs is endlessly appropriate and he climbs the Temple of Tenochtitlan as he steps up and down, up and down on the sunporch.

"For only \$20,000," he says longingly, "we could get one of these pools. Look, there's current, it's computerized, keeps moving. You can swim forever, miles and miles, in a space that's only eight feet long. It could go in the basement."

In the meantime, she is working on that enticing street filled with suburban wannabees, leftover hippies, safety-pin-eared runaways, bikers, where overhead naked lovers drift in bubbles, their beaks piercing succulent peaches, drenching those below in showers of sticky juice.

She meets the ambulatory suicide groups at the subway stop and doles out their doses, then stays with them in their suicidal drift down that bright and busy street, keeping an eye on them, trying to keep them safe and away from the shops.

The Shop Owners' Association has hired a lawyer. They have a warning agreement, and the first to spot a group telephones all the other shops. They are being driven into bankruptcy as the suicides drift into shops filled with silky, hand-embroidered, deconstructed artwear.

"Can't you keep these people under control?" they scream at her, brandishing snatched garments, as she dashes into the shops after her charges, coaxes them back into the street.

No, I can't, she wants to say, they're dying the deaths of consumers, but even she can see how after their touch, silken suppleness becomes merely lank, sequins dull, silver embroidery tarnishes.

When all her charges are safely laid to rest, when she returns to the blood heat of the home that still shelters him and her, their children, they cook their separate meals among the stalks and leaves and exploratory thrusting tendrils.

His sleek body moves deftly among the plants, the caged birds and englassed fish. Sunlight follows him from skylight to skylight as he steams brown rice, perfect broccoli, slices bananas and kiwi and mangoes. He smiles at her as he sets out the pan he has marked for her use, her special dishes.

She no longer pays attention as he unobtrusively flicks on the exhaust fan to carry dead animal molecules away from his clean pink lungs, simply sings the small steak that she will soon devour and records in a notebook. *I fill my mouth with blood, with death, after spending the day helping others die. He eats tidily, virtuously, of his rice and broccoli. Dead, they are dead, I could say, but he would have a way of countering that. So he has his green blood and I have my red.*

Sometimes she rages, tired of helping others exit but there are miles to go before she can sleep. Parents and children, older children and older parents, colleges and weddings and funerals. As his cats and dogs die and are replaced, she doesn't notice and calls them by the old names.

She stockpiles leftover sedatives and sometimes, when things seem so hard she can't go on, she takes one, just one, for a treat, thinks how easy it would be to let go, mingle, after the last body has been picked up by the following truck, take a saved dose and until she joins her peers, guide herself along that well-known route where Christmas lights line the streets all year long, glittering and sparkling, and the old cemetery is home only to the oblivion-seeking drugged, and the homeless, hiding and seeking.

What happens to us touches God. What happens to Him concerns us. We share in the same adventure and participate in the same quest. We suffer for the same reasons and ascribe the same coefficient to our common hope. ... Does it aim to make our human ordeal easier or more difficult to bear? Does the idea that God also suffers—that He suffers with us and therefore on our account—help us to bear our grief, or does it simply augment its weight? Surely we have no right to complain, since God, too, knows suffering ... But how, then, are we to speak to Him? God has no need of a name to be present. He is present in our request and its fulfillment alike. He is both question and answer. For us mortals, He is at once link and sundering, pain and healing, injury and peace, prayer and pardon. He is, and that must be enough for us. ... there is a place called “secret” and that when God is sad, He takes refuge there to weep...

— Elie Wiesel

THE AUTUMN MIST

Yelena Dubrovin

He was intrigued by her affected manners of behavior. Her lips were painted in a bright red and her skillfully penciled eyes slid over him as if she was blind. The woman was pale and her hollow cheeks had a touch of blush. She wore a small bonnet with a broad brim that cast a shadow on her face when she bent over her small delicate purse to get a handkerchief to dry her constantly watering eyes.

While trying to impress him, she jabbered non-stop, nervously rumpling her jacket. When she spoke, she hardly moved her lips, but her arched eye brows moved up and down in a strange manner.

Her voice was pleasant and very melodic with some sudden pitches that sounded like false notes in a long operatic aria. Nevertheless, he was annoyed by the lubricity of her manners, her incessant babble and her efforts to shed luster to the fount of her dappled eloquence. To all appearances, her monologue was onerous to him because at some point she was seemingly constrained and uncomfortable. He didn't interrupt her discourse watching her with some pernickety curiosity. What irritated him the most was her unnatural vulgarity that intertwined with some almost angelic innocence or even naïveté. In this he sensed some air of mystery about her.

He was a famous writer trying to spend some time in solitude, escaping a crowd of his noisy admirers. He realized that the unknown woman had no idea whom he was and had just stopped by to chat at her leisure, enjoying her free time. He learned from her that those three marvelous days on the ship had been given to her as a present by her mother.

It was a quiet cold autumn evening and the sea breeze was pleasantly refreshing. The northern wind blew from the ocean on deck bringing with it the bubbles of water that left a briny tag on their lips, redolent of the taste of a salted fish. The lonely moon suddenly cut the mist, glaring down on the water, gilding the path to the ship, and then its light faded and the moon became quite obscured. The heavy fog completely erased the visible line between the sky and the ocean. The night slowly thickened, merging with the vast expanse of the waters. It appeared as if the tiny stars and the moon drowned in the interminable ocean and the music of the night wallowed in its waves. The very air seemed replete with leisured melodies and buzzing sounds of the night.

A sudden feeling of tranquility seized her whole being as the earthy paleness spread over her cheeks. The cold stars, like small fireflies, twinkled on the distant sky, clear-green and almost pellucid. And everything suddenly became so distant, so unimportant, as well as this cold autumn night, dark viscous air and her own life. She knew about the approaching end and there, beyond the horizon, she sensed some mystery, the mystery of death. Watching the falling night merging with the ocean, she thought about immortality and infinity that transcended her capacity of apprehension of

life. One day her life too would be brought to the finish line where space and time have no limits. The wind gently touched her face, stroked her cold hands like a lover who felt her grief, her fear of demise. She cited:

I am illusion, a reality, a shadow, in pain,
Absorbing sufferings of all, in vain.
Oh, God, just let me land
Before I drown, before the coming end.
In empty space of moon eclipse,
I do exist.
Just send me stream of living light
To stay alive.

He listened to her melodic voice in surprise. The depth of her verses touched his heart. They both watched in silence as the night fell and the moon, reflecting on the surface of the dark waters, imparted to their faces a touch of a silvery hue. Admiring the beauty of the moment, he bent and looked into her eyes. And there, he found fear, helplessness and sensitivity to spiritual unknowns. At this very moment he thought that her appearance alluded to some mystery in her past. Her subtlety charmed him instantly and aroused a deep sympathy to her hidden sufferings. He realized that under the veil of vulgarity she sheltered the real woman, strange and mysterious.

“For pity’s sake, please tell me what makes you suffer,” he demanded, grabbing her hand, forgetting about his previous annoyance with her and felt how thin and fragile her hand was. She pulled it out and laughed loudly, embarrassing him for his sudden impulsive behavior. The wind caught up her spurious roar of orotund laughter and carried it far away into the ocean leaving only some ripples on its water and a distant echo of her fading voice. He didn’t utter a word and turning away from her began to walk in a sluggish pace along the deck careening from side to side as though there were high waves. He hoped that she would follow him, but she didn’t.

* * * * *

Next morning he saw her again in the dining room. She was eating her breakfast in solitude. She seemed to be loaded with abstruse thoughts, leafing through the pages of a book, as if she was deeply immersed in reading. He recognized the cover of the book even from afar – his latest novel.

The room at this early morning hour was almost empty. The shimmering sunrays rained down through the windows, playing with the crystal glasses and casting the light on her tired and yet very youthful face. She wore no make-up and only her lips had a touch of pale pink. Her heavy dark curly hair was scattered in disarray over her shoulders. Puzzled, he approached her behind the table:

“May I share your solitude?” His hand instinctively touched her shoulder. She gave a gasp and then slowly craned her head.

“Good Morning. It is a beautiful morning. Isn’t it?” She replied, glancing at him without any interest and closed her book ignoring his question.

“Yes, it is a lovely morning and I hate to see you having coffee alone.” He waved to a waiter and sat across from her.

“I noticed you reading my last novel....” She didn’t let him finish his sentence:

“Somebody left it on this table when I came...” And suddenly she blushed like a child who had been caught lying.

He stifled his smile and said seriously, “What do you think about this book?”

She hesitated to reply as if thousand thoughts burst suddenly into her mind causing her to pause. “I am impressed by your sensitivity, your ability to look deep into a soul, to see beyond the invisible line. You are an artist who can paint a portrait of a soul, feel the suffering and make the reader plunge into the story and become a part of it.” She lost all her jocular and flippancy of speech. She was now a different woman, not the one he had met last night.

“So, you are familiar with my books.” He stared at her. “I am amazed by your vision. I would say the depth of your vision. Are you writing?” She didn’t answer right away, thinking and then looked at him haughtily.

“Well, yes and no. I used to write poetry, but not anymore.” And then smiling, “Let’s go outside. I adore the autumn sun when it is so unusually warm and cold at the same time.”

He watched her closely, amazed at how much she had changed since yesterday. She didn’t try anymore to pretend or bewitch him by her vulgarity and loquaciousness and was seemingly pensive and withdrawn. Today, he was struck by some lure in her sudden quiet manners as she gracefully fluttered about the deck holding a long scarf and deeply inhaling the salt ocean breeze. She reminded him of an untamed animal trapped in a cage and searching for the way out.

“Do you travel alone? I’ll be glad to keep your company.” He said softly trying to march in step with her.

She sheered away from this question, but her face brightened with pleasure revealing her true feelings. The morning sun began to grow dim and feathery clouds hovered above the waters like white birds that spread their wings flying away from danger. The air suddenly darkened as if an invisible artist splashed foggy colors on a clean canvas. A strange ultra-mundane light cut the mist, illuminating the sky for only a moment and then the first drops of rain fell on the deck. He dared to put his arms around her shoulders, pressing her closely and feeling the heat of her skin under the light dress.

“I am fine,” she protested, easing away from his embrace. “I like to feel the touch of the first drops of rain on my face. It is like the timid kiss of a lover.” She squinted at him, flashing an expressive smile and suddenly changed the subject, looking at him over her shoulder:

“Did you sleep well last night?”

“Actually, yes, I slept like a baby. Why are you asking?”

“Because I didn’t sleep at all. I was disturbed by the emotion of our meeting. Don’t you think that emotional stress invigorates the creative process? Yesterday’s evening was sad and translucent, as if it was lit up from beyond by the cold fading moon. In my dream I had strange images floating in space before my eyes: waves, stars, twisted faces of death like in the paintings of Bosch. I have such deep awareness of the power of the sea, and its potential for death and destruction and yet of its investment in the beauty of the world and its inspiration for creativity.” All her worries seemed to melt away as she talked to him watching the glowing open sea outlined against the autumn sky.

Swept by emotion, he interrupted her:

“A German philosopher, Oswald Spengler once wrote that the creative essence of culture is progressively lost and now it becomes shallow, giving way to a soulless civilization. I have to agree with his philosophy, but nevertheless, our emotions would never dry up or die. Their force would give us this impetus of creativity and would remain in our work forever. We derive our inspiration not only from our inner being, but also from the beauty of nature that gives us energy to create. And, yes, yes, I do agree with you about the emotional stress as a vehicle for the creative process.”

He began to enjoy their conversation when she suddenly turned away from the ocean and grabbed his hand. She lost all her flamboyant colors of yesterday, her body was shaking with a feverish chill, as she turned deathly pale.

“Please help me to get to my cabin. I am tired, very tired,” she whispered in a changed voice and staggered almost fainting. He wound his arm around her waist and she put her hand on his shoulder searching for support. People were passing them by without paying any attention to them, trying to escape the cold drops of the sudden downpour.

She had just enough strength to get to her cabin. He helped her to bed and took off her shoes. He held her wrist – her pulse was all in a flutter. She was shivering and in an unusual for her peremptory tone demanded a cup of hot tea.

When he returned with tea she was already undressed and asleep. He watched her face so peaceful in her sleep, the contour of her shapely body twisted under the white sheet, her full breast rose when she heaved a groan. Even in her sleep she possessed a lustful charm, a hidden sexuality that aroused his animal instinct and long-forgotten carnal desire. He just could not force himself to leave, so he placed his aching body comfortably in the armchair, and watching her in her sleep, he too shortly was engulfed in slumber.

* * * * *

When he opened his eyes the rain had already stopped and the room was luminous with sunlight. She was still in bed, awake and pale but smiling.

“Do you feel better?” He stretched his tired body and took her hand in his.

“Oh, I am fine. It is just my hypersensitivity. Life is so difficult, so painful. It scares me to find out one day what lies behind that invisible line where the dark waters of the sea intertwine with the sky.” She raised her head above the pillow and looked straight into his eyes, as if trying to remind him of the previous evening. He felt the movement of her fingers in his hand and squeezed them with all his might.

“You make me wonder about you. Would you like to tell me your story? Sometimes it’s much easier to share your life with a stranger. Isn’t it?” He said driven by curiosity and continuing to hold her hand.

“Please let my fingers go. You hurt me.” She put her head back on the pillow feeling dizzy. Anyway, it is a long rambling story and I don’t want to bore you. I want to enjoy my trip and my sudden encounter with such a famous writer. Let’s have a good time. My story will lull you to sleep. Don’t look at me in bewilderment, please...” She stretched the word “please” and it sounded to him like a musical score. She continued without paying any attention at him. “I feel hungry again and I need a breath of fresh air. Go now and wait for me on the deck.” She said it firmly, not as a request, but as a command.

It was folly on his part to persist and he obeyed like a schoolboy. He waited for her on the deck, watching the serenity of the autumn sky and the bitterness of the heavy ocean, feeling the cold wind on his skin, thinking about her. He knew that she was not a woman of easy virtue, but an interesting and complicated woman, a puzzle he was determined to solve.

As a writer, he couldn’t resist his habit of watching people, studying their lives, exposing their naked souls. He was always impelled to bury himself in flames, to put his burning emotions on paper, take refuge in his work. He knew loneliness, despair, pain and nobody could heal them but his work, his obsession with plots, mysteries, intrigues, loves. He missed love, it lived only in his imagination; he was hungry for love. It was like an illusion, a distant outline of an unknown woman merging with the attenuated darkness. He was not afraid anymore to be hurt by love; he had faith in finding it one day, one day...

She appeared suddenly behind him, interrupting the flow of his thoughts, intruding into his life with her undue familiarity. “I hope I am not intruding.” She pronounced slowly as if reading his mind, piercing him with her divinatory eyes.

“Oh, no, not at all, just the opposite. I need some fuel, some human touch to carry me away from my dismal thoughts.” He rejuvenated. He was glad to share with her his time and began to enjoy her company. Her presence aroused in him diverse feelings, yielding to love and releasing him from the sense of reality and time. The sun generously squandered its autumn warmth and he already foresaw his victory over her

wayward nature and her stubbornness.

How often the course of events is as unpredictable and incomprehensible as the movement of human thought. They became lovers that same night, passionate lovers, plunging into the moment given to them so suddenly, so unexpectedly. He had power over her femininity, over her floating moods. She obeyed, she followed his orders; she moaned and laughed, and cried.

Three days stretched into one long night and he still didn't know her, didn't know anything about her. When he tried to grasp the core of her being, her life – she skillfully escaped his questions, his curiosity. "Don't complicate our happiness." She would say gently touching his hand. "Please don't take me back into my past. Let us forget the reality, tomorrow. Let us enjoy this dream. I don't want to wake up. This dream is so tangible, so beautiful."

However the taste of their fleeting happiness was bitter, enshrouded in obscurity, fear. They were both aware of the end and so tried to sustain their courage. He was bewildered by the miracle of completeness that they both found in each other. The complexity of her mind and unintelligible sadness, her versatility appealed to his imagination of a writer, but he couldn't decipher her soul.

Through the mist of the autumn rain, she watched him nervously puffing his pipe. She felt grateful to him for those three marvelous days that he had given to her. Their love presented them with a greater range of emotions, sensibility and depth, giving new meaning to their existence. She put her head on his shoulder, clasping her body closer to his as if searching for a shelter, a safe place, as a snail longing to hide in its shell, layers of shell. The wind, the sea, the morning air had the scent of the coming autumn. The melody of waves, the whisper of the wind created the music of sadness that tormented them, crucified them spiritually.

"You'll forget me soon. I am nobody, or maybe just that tiny star that soon will merge with the clouds," she said dreamily.

He didn't reply because he didn't know what to say to her. He felt tension and pity in his heart for her, for this seemingly insipid adventure.

They departed at the quay, where she was greeted by her husband and her mother, embraced by her sister and somebody else he couldn't see from afar. He wished he could have been invisible and that all of these people would fade away before his eyes. The dream lost its shape and turned into reality. He rushed to get home, so that he could lock himself into his work. He hoped his work would keep him away from his memories, from her.

One month passed in solitude, in writing, but unconsciously, the memories of her still rushed through his mind as he tried to push them away. He gained new power in his writing as a novel began to take shape on paper. He allowed himself to reproduce the emotions and feelings that he experienced for those short three days with her. He thought that by this time he would erase her from his memory, heal the pain of losing

her, return to his everyday routine, but he could not. Even his old friends and his habitual environment became an unexpected burden. He blamed himself for not trying to learn more about her, her life. Now, he wallowed in total inactivity, life suddenly lost its flamboyant colors.

One more month passed before he saw her again. He was frittering away the afternoon in the park, watching another boring day fade away before his eyes. It was the end of fall and the Scotch mist shrouded the sky and the streets. She appeared suddenly as if she drew back the curtain of the dense fog. She didn't notice him, being engaged in conversation with a man, perhaps her husband (he couldn't remember his face). A little boy, three or four years old, held her hand. She looked pale and peaceful and he didn't want to disturb that peace.

How could he know that she would die soon of the incurable disease, dreaming of him and afraid of seeing him again, afraid to cause him the unnecessary pain? How could he know that those three days with him were the happiest days of her short life? He would never find it out and only the autumn mist would remind him of such a fleeting episode in his rich and yet lonely life.

Eyes

John Sandoval

its all in the eyes
every death and every birth
and all blooms to come
its all in the eyes
though I am uncertain
exactly how the eyes work
that is to say, precisely, where and how they begin and end
but, certainly, its all in the eyes
from start to finish, eternity and the Holy Ghost's hat included
at a glance, one into the other
eyes telling the story absolute
a history ours – a history not ours
eyes so fragile, eyes so moist, eyes in constant motion
so like planets in some ocean suspended
orbiting a ventriloquism blind
trying to ford a telepathy silent

PIGEONS

Edward Butscher

A dark, lean, hard man who spoke little forever hatted like a taxicab driver, his childish smile rare as a peacock unfolding below the flock of pigeons that exploded from upturned palms like electrified stones his form distinct above us on the tenement roof: a foreign saint set against rabid clouds.

He was our uncle, we were told, but he never looked at us, shy as a Dutch tulip, and my father said in secret (man to man) that he was only a cousin from the family's corrupt branch where blood seethed wild with syphilis herds and was thin enough to candle eggs—his wife a huge balloon figure sloped over a kitchen window chair who could not bear children.

It was on the Lower East Side, just after the war when we first glimpsed him and his pigeon host and I guessed from the way my father gauged his rooster frame that he was unique, a specimen divine in the madness propelling him into the sky each morning, a laugh like startled mallards as he unlatched the wire door and slowly pivoted on tar paper in tune, in time, to circling shafts of light.

Near the end of both their lives, my father and he sat side by side in a urine-stained couch to monitor TV soap operas. Teeth gone, nearly deaf, he could not stop clucking as my father sipped his headless beers, reciting newspaper horror stories by rote—fried infants, raped co-eds, tortured cats—asking me once if I had ever tasted a “coon hair pie.”

At my father's wake, he slumped alone in the rear
and played with himself, cave grin bearing witness
to the betrayal of our shared laughter, and soon he
was also dead, his wife dancing in a thin nightgown
on the griddle of a snow-ribbed street, while black
attendants handled him gently into an ambulance,
dawn horizon bleak as a tossed purse, pigeons
ascending like tattered angels from my mouth.

Frostbitten

Phoebe Wilcox

Born nine months to the day after Kennedy was shot, she grew over time to resemble a rather skewed version of Marilyn Monroe, if Marilyn had needed braces and never gotten them, if Marilyn had hit skid row instead of the big time, and if Marilyn, quite frankly didn't give a rat's ass half the time whether she was wearing sweats or some bizarro retro gear from some smelly old thrift shop. And she never had the stuff dry-cleaned before wearing it either. Amy was a terrified forty-year-old mental virgin who had been made cold by life's various icy vicissitudes, most of them thoughtless and male. Subjected early to the backhanded lust of a long-ago lover's overzealous pants and understaffed willpower banks, Saturday mornings were now spent at her kitchen table with platefuls of icicles. She liked to pin her hair up with them. Making cold curls. When the icicles melted her hair was done.

She'd kept the heat at 52 degrees for at least two decades. She bundled herself against all men. *You want to look at my body, how'd ya like this? Look at it through this Hollywood fat suit I found in the dumpster behind Target. Didn't know they sold fat suits at Target did you, big boy? How about this? You wanna look at my body? How about looking at it while I'm rolled up in Aunt Marge's yard sale rug. The one with the dog hair still on it. How's that for attractive? No? Well, guess what?! I don't care! I'm going to sit in my kitchen rinsing my heart with ice water until it's pure again. With ice water hauled twelve miles over the rough terrain of my own negativity and I don't care!*

It was a palpitating heart of red with blue veins. It always turned faintly purple when she iced it, like the soft color of dusk at the end of a winter day, like the color she imagined gooseberries in a fairy tale to be. The heart-sanitizing was a hard regimen to keep up with, especially when traveling. She once had to clean her heart with about three swigs leftover from the bottom of a bottle of Perrier. That's all she had with her at midnight in a train station in Paris. Yeah, in France, a foreigner with crooked teeth, wearing a white dress like something Marilyn would have been proud of, but smeared with the car grease of her terminally bad attitude, and she was kneeling by the ticket window, dowsing her heart and scrubbing away at it as hard as she could, rubbing with paper towels and Perrier, trying to make herself clean in the deserted station, when along came a passel of gypsies. They were people like her, the kind that didn't care what anybody thought. They'd wash their two-day old underwear out in the fountain if they had to. .And wasn't that the fact of it! She wasn't too far off in this conjecture. They were actually washing their socks. And yes, wasn't there just a whole entire *fountain*, a big spouting, spraying, glistening, purling fountain just yards away from where she labored with her Perrier?!

As seen by the midnight light in a train station in Paris, with a family of gypsies loitering nearby, her heart looked like glossy iridized glass of some sort, more artistic

than functional. What was the point of it really? Icicles had a point. Or points. They were sharp. One could dig, carve, scrape, stab, and kill with them. One could kill ex-boyfriends with them.

I loved you! How could you?! And with her! I will tear all that glorious silky hair from your head. If you would just let go of my arms. It's so embarrassing to be here, in the vestibule of the bar, with ones arms pinned to the sides of ones ears, struggling and seething and wanting to kill, being unable to kill. And everyone smirking as they head out the door. Oh, icicles. The future would be all icicles. Marilyn, Marilyn, our deranged and beloved Marilyn, oh, you can even curl your hair with them, Marilyn!

But it was warm in Paris this night. There were no icicles. There was no killing. There were only her, her little nephew, Timmy, and a family of gypsies and their happy German shepherd in the station that night. She looked at the father of the gypsy family. She looked at the mother. She looked at the kids riding up and down the escalator railings on their bellies. She looked at the dog lapping water out of the sprinkling fountain. They were all dark and beautiful and wild. They were unsleepy rebels. She herself felt like she needed a special delivery of a giant down mattress at some point not too far from immediately. It would not be forthcoming.

Her filtration system was breaking down. She could tell because the gypsy father was not wholly unattractive to her. He didn't look like he was all harsh stubble and belly paunch. Nuh-uh. He was pretty, the way she'd always liked her boys. But this was long past the time of boys. This was the time of men. Men, they always make you pay for everything in butterfly wings or sanity. She'd had wings once but she wasn't sure they were still where she'd left them. It had been a long time since she'd looked behind her. The gypsy father sat on the edge of the fountain washing a black sock the way she rinsed her heart, sort of roughly and tenderly. Maybe the fluorescent lights were messing with her head. He looked up, briefly in her direction. She wasn't even sure he'd noticed her. But when he looked up like that, almost looking at her, his eyes seemed somehow to be playing rare music. His razor stubble wasn't even gross. It was *sexy* for heaven's sake. What in God's name was happening to her?

Was she ready for cloudy-pink mixed drinks of fresh Wish fruit and lime? She was oh-so-tired, and there was no feather mattress forthcoming. She just wanted to lay her head in his lap at the edge of that spraying glistening fountain and she wanted to fall asleep in the arms of that seemingly manly mirage. She doubted herself. She'd never been to Paris, never been up this late in the fluorescent lights with gypsies. She thought gypsies were from the old days anyway. But looking at him made her very, very hungry. Her wings, whether fowl or divine, were stirring. On her shoulder blades. She remembered them now. Where they'd once been. When she could fly. Before icicles ruled the land.

Thin membranes between worlds, between realities, between good and bad, between God and the Devil. *Oh, Devil, I am so sorry for you. Were you only curious? Like a toddler? Like our dearest loves? Marilyn. Stop calling yourself Marilyn, Amy!*

You are no Marilyn! You've been stripped of your wings and spent your life in shabby sheik. She thinks about standing and walking over to him. About asking him his name. Not the assigned one given to him by a human mother, but the real one, the one given to him by his heart and circumstances, the one tattooed on his very soul. And then she wanted to touch that name with the tip of her tongue. She felt almost like she could love. So she wouldn't have to stand and walk. She could crawl. Forward. Hand over hand. Dream after dream. Feet following sliding knees. Shame flowing backwards over the past, the present pulling her into it like a greedy mouth. Go. He sits there surrounded by warm spraying water. There he is. Embedded like a fossil in one significant night. Can you touch him, sweet grave-bound Marilyn before you are gray and he is distant past?

Might they be safe in the fountain pool? *Give me the fountain of your life. What do you fight for? What do you fight against?*

One kiss and the station burns down around them, collapses thin membranes between worlds. So much fire and water.

Andy, how could you?! I loved you, I loved you, I loved you?! And with her?!

The gypsy man is the kind she dreads. The kind with too much power. She crawls closer, closer.

Should she cash in a cumulous cloud for a taxi ride home? This France is like another planet. She doesn't even know how to hail a taxi here. She's helpless here.

They love it when you crawl.

Crawl closer, my sweet, crawl closer.

You will never learn. Miles of tile beneath her palms, the occasional cigarette butt. She moves as through a dream over bright and beautiful rubbish. She would do anything, anything if only they would be made pure.

Reverence makes it possible to be whole, though ignorant.

It is the wholeness of understanding.

The imagination is our way in to the divine Imagination,

permitting us to see wholly

—as whole and holy—

what we perceive as scattered,

as order what we perceive as random.

We live in eternity while we live in time.

it is only by imagination that we know this.

— Wendell Berry

Winter Walk

Michael Estabrook

White cat sitting on a rock
in a field of dead grass staring at me.
Frozen brown-white ice floes,
water churning underneath.
Stark trees shadows in the dusk,
branches cracked and broken
from the storm.

The Unfathomed

Allegra Jostad Silberstein

*who knows what causes the opening
and closing of a door— Jim Harrison*

After you have locked up for the night
who knows what causes the opening
and closing of a door:
the wind of forgetfulness—

that strand of dark hair
curled under the kitchen cabinet
belonging to no one you know.
The keys that are missing.

A sudden sound of tumble, a rustle.
In the upstairs bedroom,
fallen on the floor by your bed,
Flaubert's *Coeur Simple*.

A branch hanging low on the oak tree
by the living room window
eases its way over
to the door. Leaves enter there,

the lock gone lazy in its guardianship.
Who knows what causes the opening
and closing of a door or
what we must do before we die.

THE BLACK SILK SKIRT FALLING
Lyn Lifshin

as if it was her,
something in her
leaving, stepping
out of her last
skin, chrysalis
about to be free
as the grackles
she watched those
last days. This
dream on the eve
of my mother's
birthday, there
was something in
the sound of her
skirt falling,
a pool blacker
than midnight
nothing was
reflected in. Then
the whoosh, the
wind of where
she was and then
wasn't. These days
of rain, as if to
wash her away.
Still, like the water
fall outside our
apartment window,
she tumbles like
a river, so loud and

THE WOMAN ON THE METRO, ORANGE LINE, FOGGY BOTTOM
Lyn Lifshin

grey face, a collapsed wafer,
an apple left over winter on
some branch glazed in ice
that's melted. Not uninteresting,
like other wreckage, abandoned
houses that seem to have sighed
and then sunk into themselves.
Startling, raved, she takes out
powder first and dusts her whole
face, a silt of fine dust before
rouge, cheeks and chin as if to
pull your eye to what isn't pale
and lined. Then, lipstick. But just
as she is about to add what I
suspect will be a tawny shade,
burnt umber or rust, a man stands
in my view, it's as if someone
stood up, a giant, just at the end
of a movie. I wanted the last
face, the transformation, see
the stylish Washington women in their
black coats, perfect skin are now
here, faceless as some Picasso
or Modigliani face on their way to
see a lover, buy antiques. Trying to
look behind their mask, I miss
my stop

**WITH EVERYTHING OPENING, PEARS, MAGNOLIAS,
CHERRY PETALS, APPLE, DOGWOOD**

Lyn Lifshin

the dead bloom, planted so long ago. You never expected much from them. It's as if with everything exploding, they want you to marvel at them too. The beauty of the plum tree pales "short lived compared to us." "Yes, they are lovely," another sighs but remember how I brushed your hair, washed it in lemon juice. Doesn't that count?" Sometimes the dead are too loud, their fingers clutching, hissing, "what do you remember of the way I used to look?" One newly dead reminds me of the lilacs he left in a blue Persian jar. The dead are sure you would like to see them and you would but you're not sure how much to say, bring the green emerald sweater you bought too big for one to wear. The new blossoms must want to make the dead tell you what they hadn't. They've been still all winter, their season. I want to just watch new life unfolding, the mourning dove on her nest, the wild plum, camellia. But when I try to sleep with the window open, the night bird in blue wind, it's always my mother's voice, "Honey, why haven't you called?"

Wind shakes the flowers that hang over the water,
on the other side families sit down to eat.

I know it.

Not one petal has been torn loose,
and I lie here with my hands on you, not moving,
seeing us today under the trees
sitting with our legs crossed facing each other, talking,
and try to remember what we said.

Get up. I want to explain
what no other couple has ever understood—
the silence, our two skins, the fact that one dies first.

– Stephen Berg

Birdfall

Kristin Roedell

*I found a raven outside my door
still, on the splintered frame,
eyes closed as virgin's lips
and frost in folded wings.
I laid it aside with summer's gloves,
in rainless, windless quiet
to fold it in the lulling earth,
when dawn lit up the aspen grove.
I dreamt that night the bird rose up
and I rose also like sudden hope.
The wind was whispering of gulls
in flocks above the sussing grass.
I opened a window when morning came
It lingered to taste the mist, and flew.
I watched it lift above the grove,
black wings against the morning moon.*

from **Lacuna**

Syrinx

Rachel Day

He asked me to be his,
Perfect beneath his lips,
Caught between his hands.
I ran like brushfire
To the walls of river reeds.
There I changed, senseless and free.

But still he came.
With the neatest twist,
He snapped me in two,
Bound me together,
Put his lips to my lips of reed
And forced me to sing.

Waking

Allan Johnston

This ceramic slip of sky
holds a moon
too still to be real
a moon you have dreamt of
and yet not that moon
an egg cup of sleep
that laughs in the soft wash
of dawn
 your hand
moves out of sleep
to your mouth there are cobwebs
on the window
light falls through the room
and beyond
uncut fields of grass
bring joy to birds

it is of this
you have been dreaming
the moon that shimmers
the unnecessary moon
in eaves where swallows
glide in light
and spiders whisper
out the whims
of their webs

clouds bleed
over scars of mountains

we roll and touch in sleep
in this way we waken

First appeared **Weber Studies**

Home before Dark

Allan Johnston

There are ways
Across dark fields
Breaking open with flower
At sundown;

Ways to encase
The sensation
That the moon rides high
On its laugh
Of light.

This is the road
Before sundown,
And there are ways
In every sense

To lose yourself
Before dark
While somewhere across fields
Home is hiding.

First published in Mid-America Poetry Review

And I have no defense against helplessness,
the *bête noire* that springs up on a moment's notice:
a child, for instance, made to hide in the upstairs bathroom,
made to cower at the creak of someone mounting the stairs,
someone who had helped to create her world, and now,
night after night, is tearing it apart, limb by slender limb.
A child I can't save from the dreaded *snick snick*
of the door handle, which will turn too many times, even years later
in her own triple-locked house, as she sleeps in a loft bed, face down,
her hands folded over what she calls, for good reason, her privates.

– Thomas Centolella

Car Interiors

LB Sedlacek

A new face at the window is
Unexpected, but welcome
As steaming hot cocoa
Or imported tea or soft
Cloth comfort and bucket seats
Taking cruise control for
Granted, neglecting mileage,
Avoiding oil changes
Or the same old arguments
About why some live in
Mansions while others
Sleep in cars.

***Oranges:
An Essay in Parts***

Gila Lyons

1.

I remember their legs.

I remember the long legs of the children at the art camp in Boston, their lithe bodies dense with energy. They fidgeted and bounced in their chairs, legs swinging back and forth, kicking the undersides of the tables in front of them. Outside the summer day snapped with light, and the hot air boiled with the scent of grass and asphalt, while we instructed them in the dark auditorium. Some leaned over sketch pads, some hunched over lined Steno-pads, some bent over silk stretched on wooden frames, flooding it with dye.

Experience is not enough, we might have said, You need to create something from it. It's not enough, we might have said, This body, these senses given us.

2.

The richness in the mouth, the warmth that floods the body. We couldn't bring food into the reading so we stood on the marble steps outside in the breezy evening cooling to blue, wind up our skirts and through our hair, slurping down the thick melting fudge we'd bought in white paper cups from the Dessert Truck on East Eighth Street. Such an elemental pleasure – sugar, fat, the endorphins jolted alert by having our most basic needs met. When we took our seats inside, the writers read and read and read. Some words made us laugh (“My throwing you in this river is a metaphor,” said the bullies to the English major), some drudged up regret and pain that forced each of us into private momentary darkness, but none of the words was as real as the deep earthy musk of chocolate lingering in the crevices between gum and cheek, lip and tooth, coating the center of my hot tongue.

3.

Lydia Woolf, lived in a trailer on top of a hill in the woods. In every season the hill seemed to be covered in bright orange and mottled brown leaves, wet, sweet-smelling in their state of decay. But Lydia had sparkling blue eyes – clear, searing, wild - and white skin which glowed against her dark surroundings. She had an early version of the mullet - layered brown hair that was puffy on top, then cut close to the neck and trailed off around her shoulders to a thin little tail. The cotton of her clothes pilled into little balls and her sweatpants and sweatshirts were usually a few seasons outgrown – the cuffs not quite reaching her wrists or ankles. We'd tear around the woods surrounding her house, inhaling the damp leaf-spiced air, grinding mud into our sneakers and the palms of our hands when we fell. There were no other houses up on that hill, and it was always dark or darkening. I don't remember speaking.

4.

Summer in Ojai, California, I lived on a small hill just above an orange grove. In the baking afternoons, when the sun beat down with a heat that exerted weight, I would walk through the shade of the fragrant groves, plucking hot oranges and sucking out their juice. The air around me buzzed with crickets and occasionally some of them would leap from under my sandaled foot like animated stones. There was some hushed otherness about the place, but I didn't know what it was until I read the poem "Oranges in a Tree," by Alberto Rios. In it he described oranges as balled-up birds that have lost their flight, whose wings are folded into the spongy white underneath the rinds. He describes them as infants "loud in the song of their great need,/mouths tethered to the green beaks/that feed them." That someone else had locked himself in a room, taken himself from that raw experience of orange and need and light and the murmur of captured flight, and toiled at a desk to give those impressions their shape

helped me to fully feel the groves, to know why, as I walked the uneven rows of scraggly, sun-baked trees I felt the desire to stroke each one. All this from a poet who ends his collection with the lines, “But I do not want to be hasty in trying to capture or describe it./ Words are our weakest hold on the world.”

5.

At Wesleyan University the professors had grown pale and small, their wrinkled skin sucked dry by paper and recirculated air. Some sported pockets of fat around the thighs, others waved scrawny arms in front of the classroom, flapping sagging flesh. My first semester I took a geology class that met in a basement classroom of cold cement and buzzing fluorescent light, where we sat listening to lectures about seismic activity and studying textbook drawings of rock composition and fault lines. On the last day of class our teacher shocked us all by pulling up in a big green van and driving us to the ocean so that we could know the graininess of granite basalt on our palms and see with our own eyes the dull sparkle of white quartz. We put the ocean stones in our mouths and sucked on their salt.

6.

My first semester at Wesleyan I took a course in Chinese Philosophy and for the final I wrote a paper titled, *The Differences in Realizing Tao Through the Analects and the Tao Te Ching*. I wrote about the Middle Way, about having space in one’s life to let the mind to go blank, to not-think, to not-do, to not-try. This stood, I realized, in direct contrast to the success of academic life. I wrote such a convincing paper, that, at the end of my first semester of college, I left.

7.

Breakfast at the farm was multi-coursed and took an hour. The long wooden table sagged with plates of fried potatoes, fried eggs, pancakes, maple syrup made from last year's sap, melon or apples or peaches cut up in a bowl and glistening with liquid sugar. I lived in a tiny silver airstream trailer at the edge of the fields. I'd wake in the morning and walk a few hundred feet to let the turkeys out of their shed. I'd spend the day snapping weeds with my fingers or plopping thin stems of transplants in the ground and covering them with loamy earth, or pushing tiny lettuce seeds, encased in their protective blue clay, into the cool, moist soil with my index finger: one per hole, like tiny universes dropped into the black space of space. I washed bright pink radishes in buckets of ice water, and bundled them in elastic bands for the market. I pulled deep purple beets from the ground and tore off their leaves. Eagles screeched from branches of trees surrounding the fields. The sky was an uninterrupted sheet of blue.

8.

At night other farm-hands slept on the ground, in the wind, gazing up at the sky or dropping quickly into a sore-muscled sleep, staying with the body, their days and night one fluid variance of feel. But I took myself out from under the overturned colander of the sky, huge and domed and letting in countless pinpricks of light, and climbed into the smelly little trailer I shared with five large spiders and a mouse. I would read folk songs from an old book of lyrics, copying my favorites into my journal with a pen, so that I could see how it felt to write such beautiful words with my own hands.

9.

The life of the body wasn't enough.

10.

I once loved a carpenter from whose bed I watched get ready for work every morning. He'd button up heavy work pants flecked with paint and flannel shirts saturated with saw dust and dotted with tiny holes where rough-edged wood or sharp tools had snagged it. I watched his final flourishes of folding work gloves into breast pocket, of buckling leather tool belt low on his hips and one by one filling its weathered loops with hammer, tape measure, screw driver, chalk. After he left I would drift in and out of sleep for a few more hours before getting up to teach or to write, depending on the day. And while I sat in front of a glowing screen, or scrawled verbs on a chalkboard, I envied him his daily use of his body that enabled him to construct something of immediate and practical use - a re-paneled floor, a kitchen window frame, hanging bookshelves, a backyard porch.

11.

Camping in the Arizona desert I found myself surrounded by coyote cries - one, then ten, twenty - surrounded in all directions by their howling and the desert dark. I had come for a night of quiet and space, to get away from my apartment walls and the refrigerator buzz. I lay on sand of broken rock and ground-up quartz that dusted my sleeping bag and made its way onto my scalp through my hair. Every coyote cry, every dry leaf rustling on a creosote bush seemed a warning I couldn't understand. Fears fluttered wildly in my mind. It was only eight-thirty, nine more hours until the first blue hues of sky. To fill the time I wrote, giving sentences to the images swirling in my mind, fighting against them with a barrage of words. Mosquitoes and moths fluttered in the circle of light my flashlight made on the white page. The light blinded to the night when I looked up from the lit white sheet.

12.

The airplane plummeted. My mind: a white flash of silence. In the unadulterated experience of body, all attention was kinetic, trained only on where my body was in space –falling, stomach pushed up to throat, brain pressed against the roof of the skull. It was only after we leveled off, after the wings pushed back against the air they had slipped through and the cabin pressure normalized, that a barrage of words flooded in, working out how I would tell the story to friends.

Quadlibet

Joseph Farley

quadlibet – n.

1. A philosophical or theological point proposed for disputation or a disputation of such a point.
2. A whimsical combination of familiar melodies or texts

quadlibet

Ancestral rhythms dwell in the blood.
We are born with them,
or inoculated with the sounds
by the humming of parents,
tunes of the radio,
the phonograph.

Everywhere there is music.
Birds infect us
along with cicadas, crickets
and chimes from ice cream trucks.
We breath in music
learning songs from friends
learning the language of poetry
through the touchstone
of every day speech,
the chanting of prayers,
the ranting of street preachers.

Printed words from dusty books
add spice, shake up
our natural instinct for words,
make us think long and hard
about each syllable,
the forming of the lips,
the placement of the tongue
and the shape of strange squiggles
on the skin of dead trees.
Inside us all this music,

all these words,
dance and blend and mingle,
and if we are lucky,
we say something new,
hum a tune new to the world,
but before we get too proud
we must examine our words
and listen to each note,
find the ghosts of ancestors,
and the natural world
hiding in the space between
gutturals and fricatives.

Neutercane – n. subtropical storm that is small than a hurricane in size, but closet in force, but also has characteristics of a cyclone.

Lets get rid of all this he she melodrama.
Neutrality explodes with the force
of hundred mile per hour winds.
The rains bucket down,
drenching bodies and emotions.
In this confused state,
why should one seek
further definition?
Just accept the storm
and be one with it,
or fight like hell
to get to a safer shore.

Neo-Psalm 9

make a joyful noise
a whisper or a gasp
in the heated night
clutch at pillows and sheets
roll your head from side to side
heave your chest
and rock your belly
and know that this moment is good

and was given to you
and you alone
a tender bud
opening in moonlight
to the enormity of it all

inanition

n. the quality or state of being empty, physical weakness caused by lack of food or water; or a sense of intellectual, moral or social loss or emptiness.

inanition

If a word could sum up an age...

the cadavers move,
but are all hollow inside,
souls as empty
as their out turned pockets.

hope is a fickle thing.
bankers and CEOs
can afford it by the bucket,
served in bottles
chilled in ice.

the rest do the best they can
living on stalwart supports:
family, friends, alcohol, god.
pick your favorite opiate,
or at least one you can afford.

The Show Must Go On

Don't get excited by your execution.
It and your life before was never really more
than a display to distract your fellow travelers
on this road trip going nowhere;
for that you get a standing ovation.
Now move along my child,
the gallows can't wait longer.
There are many in the show
and you are not the only star.
Feel the rope draw tight.
It is woven from the finest hemp.
You will die in style,
so take a fall for the audience,
and smile, smile, smile.

Neo-Psalm 21

blessed are the prophets
and blessed are we
for we are them
and they are us

in distant times
and distant lands
in forests, on mountains
in desert sands

holy were and holy are
those who have heard God
and spoken His words
with tongues of fire

I guarantee you that no modern story scheme, even plotlessness, will give a reader genuine satisfaction, unless one of those old-fashioned plots is smuggled in somewhere. I don't praise plots as accurate representations of life, but as ways to keep readers reading. When I used to teach creative writing, I would tell the students to make their characters want something right away—even if it's only a glass of water. Characters paralyzed by the meaninglessness of modern life still have to drink water from time to time. One of my students wrote a story about a nun who got a piece of dental floss stuck between her lower left molars, and who couldn't get it out all day long. I thought that was wonderful. The story dealt with issues a lot more important than dental floss, but what kept readers going was anxiety about when the dental floss would finally be removed. Nobody could read that story without fishing around in his mouth with a finger.

— Kurt Vonnegut

When Dreams Emerge like Butterflies

Judith Cody

I was stapled
by a pin
and my eyes
scratched the darkness
(wrapped and twisted)
tightly wound.

In the still cocoon
a single thought awoke,
a sound of fish
striking through the water
or lace tearing,
and I waited
for a slit in the wrapping
with the light
stroking through.

Moth in the Footlights

Judith Cody

Like the geisha's
pale silk fans,
wings breathed
an age-old meter
against the air,

they quivered on the arcs
of an undulating course
with an inborn certainty
of each impending pulse
raising in the destined
flux and reflux,

then small with concentration
the moth circumscribed
its tremulous
life flight's passage,
a scant hand-span
above the stage.

Lovers and Other Spies

Judith Cody

You have keen ears
you can hear me
slip through the dark.

You listen, listen
O,
you listen
for my whisper-moans,
for my loud red rhythms
twisting past the darkness.

You listen
for my cries.

I am quiet,
I listen.

box cutters

Cheryl Clarke

Everyday at the Newark, N.J. Penn train station newsstand over a daily Times and a soft pack of Marlboro regulars I saw them. Especially I remember the smaller one with the black and piercing eyes and beautiful face like Liz Taylor in "Cat." (There I said it again.) The other shaved his head with Magic Shaving powder. Looked expectantly out of pearly gray eyes spilling over the irises over a bag of trail mix.

De-

tained in Texas with box

cutters. De-

ported back to Pakistan.

Both. Everyday at the Newark

Penn train station newsstand.

'Would that explain

the box cutters instead of terror?' my sister proffers over

reefer and an ecological tea.

Writing for me isn't a natural thing that I just keep doing, the way fish swim and birds fly. It's something that's done under a certain kind of provocation, a particular urgency. It's the transformation, through an elaborate impersonation, of a personal emergency into a public act (in both senses of that word). It can be a very trying spiritual exercise to siphon through your being qualities that are alien to your moral makeup—as trying for the writer as for the reader. You can wind up feeling more like a sword-swallower than a ventriloquist or impersonator. You sometimes use your-self very harshly in order to reach what is, literally speaking, beyond you.

– Philip Roth

It Happened One Morning

D Krizman

The gray of the morning began to seep into his consciousness, through the various sounds that were coming from... somewhere. It was difficult to block them out from the dreamscape where he was. His dream vision seemed to drift in and out of focus as each successive clunk, clang and squeak pierced the veil. "Wait, no." he thought through his flailing consciousness. "Not yet..." Bang! And now there came an irritating scraping sound. His eyes opened slowly, first one, then the other, his eye muscles straining slightly against the crusty glue of sleep. Voices came now, sounding clearer, the murmurs were flowing into "Hello", and "Good morning." A loud nasal laugh, joined by another and yet another. Coming to a crescendo then fading quickly in the otherwise cavernous silence.

"It's *only the guards. 2nd watch is coming on.*" he muttered to himself while he ventured a look around his cell from under his sheet and wool blanket. Once again that strange feeling overcame him. It happens every morning! That harsh realization - Damn, I'm still in prison. Even after all these years you would have thought it would fade. But no, every morning seemed to begin this way.

"*What was I dreaming!*" he asked himself and tried hard to think about it before the remembrance completely faded. "I think / *was traveling, somewhere... somewhere on the road. No. Wait, on a tour... on a big concert tour. I was on tour with.... Elvish! Now that's really bizarre.*" he thought. Being in prison did have its more humorous moments and today had started out with a crazy dream. It seemed to illustrate just how crazy life could be, especially when you end up where you would have never expected to.

Turning his attention back to his rumpled, heavy, dark gray wool blanket, he vaguely remembered it dropping right and his cellie retrieving it and passing it up to him with an exasperated sigh. He liked the heaviness of that blanket when he slept. It was comforting and secure.

"Hey, cellie.", he called down in a muted voice. No answer. But then as he slid down from his upper bunk his cellie Dukes stirred and murmured.

"Hey, what's going on?" asked Dukes.

This was odd in and of itself because Dukes was always up way early.

"Breakfast soon, but its five down today, we still have a few before they pull the bar.", he answered, while he stood barefoot on the cold painted concrete floor of their cell and felt the relief from the morning's first piss.

The cell was small, more of a large closet. The two bunks were bolted to one wall, leaving a small front to back walkway. On the back wall was a small steel sink next to the open maw of the steel toilet. There was no seat on the toilet, just the icy rim. Five Down was an expression used to describe how the officers were releasing the men

from their cells, starting with the top or fifth tier and working down. Every other day the guards released one up. They were on the second tier.

To start his day off right he had to shake the prison blues that haunt every man doing a lot of time. He sat back on his bunk, closed his eyes, took a deep breath and exhaled slowly, allowing the hoard of negative thoughts to fade away. Repeated several times, this centering began to have its effect. Then he began... *"Our Father, Who art in heaven..."*

Long ago it became obvious that only through prayer and clinging ferociously to Jesus Christ, that life behind the wall would have any meaning. He had to allow God's Spirit to work through him. .

His morning prayers now concluded, he allowed himself to fully open up to the world around him, gently wondering if he might already feel any better. "Yes." he thought, *"but only just a bit. It will come."* This too, was pretty normal. "

"Thank you my God for all you have done and continue to do for me." This whisper prayer was one he repeated often during the day. You see, by being humble and reminding himself that he was not alone; that God was ultimately in control, only then would the warm sense of calm begin to overtake him. Still feeling somewhat puzzled, he asked himself *"What in the world was that Elvis dream about?!"* After some thought, he figured it was far better to end his night's sleep with a corny dream than one that left him feeling unsettled.

His cellie also had a morning routine of prayer. However, it was much more involved than his, usually including reading of scripture & then praying, listening to taped sermons through headphones and studying his bible. Watching all of that effort sometimes made him wonder, "Am I doing enough?", "Should I *be doing more?*" He regularly read the scriptures, meditated and prayed throughout the day. But upon reflection, he felt content. *"God's will is God's will; I must stay focused and open to His guidance. I have faith He will give it to me,"* he whispered.

This was about all the time the two men had because the guard had just pulled the enormous archaic iron lever at the end of their row that in turn slid back the three inch iron bar that had blocked the cell doors from opening. Clank! Bang! And the men flooded from their cells out onto the narrow concrete walkway running the length of the enormous five story cell block. Just shy of one hundred men, some walking fast, as if they were in a race, began streaming by before the two could exit their cell. All the men were headed for the chow hall to get their breakfast and then on to any obligations they might have. Some worked assigned prison jobs, some had been ordered to attend basic education classes, some were headed to the yard to workout, some would maybe cop some dope and spend the day tweaking or nodding in their cells.

This was the "Big House" - San Quentin State Prison. A notorious piece of California history built, beginning in the mid-1800s, for the Gold Rush criminals. Originally, large square rigged merchant ships had been decommissioned, stripped of their masts and permanently moored just offshore to house prisoners. These ships

were quickly overcrowded and the ensuing rancid conditions slowly gave way to permanent, on-shore structures. They were built with granite blocks cut by prisoners from the quarry that still overlooks the prison to this day. Some of these original structures still exist although mostly as state historical monuments on the prison grounds. The prison was perched literally on the edge of the waters of the San Francisco bay, updated over the decades and is still the only prison to house the state's Death Row. "Death" as a word and in and of itself is quite distasteful, so the department of corrections thought they might take out some of the sting. Now it is called "Condemned Row". The guys on the row also prefer it.

Many times he had thought of his fellow lifers, many with decades of time under their belts. They were hoping that they might be given parole. Then he turned his thoughts to the men living on the "Row". Lives lived in a different limbo, either fighting for their sentences to be commuted or simply waiting to die at the state's hand. The state had recently announced completion of the sparkling clean new death chamber that supposedly ensured a more humane execution. He could only wonder how those condemned men who had exhausted their appeals felt about the news.

"Death by all our hands!" he said.

"What's that?" Dukes asked, turning to face him over his shoulder as they exited the cell.

"Oh, it's nothing really. I was just thinking about..." But he never got to finish. His cellie." had already slipped out of the cell door and into the flow of convicts rushing by. He was carried away like a dry leaf that's fallen into the gutter after a heavy rain.

The day had officially begun. He exited and put the padlock on the cell door. In San Quentin once the bar was pulled by the guard, they had to lock up their own cells. "Truly there's : no honor among thieves," he chuckled.

"Good morning, D." He spun around.

"Hey, good morning Paul," he answered. Paul, like D, was new to the prison and D had met him only a week or so before. Paul lived in a cell down the tier. "Did you sleep alright?"

"Yeah, just not enough," Paul replied. "I stayed up kinda late. My cellie and I had one of 'those' conversations. Its all good though. It looks light it might be real nice outside today!" he added mustering enthusiasm.

"I sure hope so," said D, "Especially since we've had those icy rains the last few days."

Exiting the cell block for the chow hall, they both slowed up and instinctively looked up to see brilliant blue.

"Ah, Paul you were right! God's gift, no?" D offered. Paul smiled wide and his long well combed beard parted to reveal the grin.

Whenever D looked at his new friend, he could not help but be reminded of St.

Paul in the Bible because of the striking resemblance to the classic paintings and depictions he'd seen over the years. In fact D had recently found a book on the cell block shelves about St. Paul and the illustration on the cover was a classical style painting that was his friend Paul, almost exactly, although a few years in the future. D had picked up the book and given it to Paul who was also stopped in his tracks by the resemblance.

The discovery that the day was going to be nice enough to go out to the yard and the brief talk with Paul had lifted D's mood further. The darkness in his gut had faded. He also felt a bit of anticipation because he had signed up for early morning phone time after breakfast, hoping to call his oldest son Scan who lived with his wife down south near San Diego. As he thought about making the collect call he remembered just how much of a two edged sword the phone was. It really did cut both ways.

The joy of connecting with loved ones, of being able to allow oneself a bit of dignity and to pretend to be free always seemed to be blunted by the constant reminders all around him of exactly where he was. As much as D longed to wrap his arms around his kids, unless they came to visit, it was impossible. It had been close to five years since the last visit. He'd learned how to hug them over the phone and be a dad in his letters. That old song lyric from the late '60s ran through his mind... "When ya comin' home son? I don't when. But, we'll get together then, dad. You know we'll have a good time then." It was a song about a father realizing his son had grown up to be just like him. •

D remembered the times when his kids were young and had asked him to come home early, not to go on this or that business trip... "Just be here for me dad." Now the roles had reversed. His kids were busy living their lives. They would tell him, "Sorry dad, work, school, the kids, just stuff. You know. I just won't be able to get away for a while."

"I understand, hopefully you'll visit soon." he would answer. And he did understand, more than they could know! As all this was running through his mind, D uttered another whisper prayer asking God to continue to keep his kids safe in his mighty hands.

Standing in the long line outside the chow hall entrance, D asked "Do you have family on the streets, Paul?"

"Sure do although that's kind of a touchy subject these days." answered Paul. "I was married, but now that's a non-issue. That was a big mistake! And my kids are out there, doing well... I hope... It's been a while since I've heard from them, although I am in regular contact with my mom who tries to keep an eye on them. She's terrific, always there for me."

"Mom's are always there for us!" D replied, "But yes, it seems we all worry about the kids. My oldest son disappeared for more than a year. Then one day a letter arrived at the last prison I was in. It was a long one, more thoughtful and mature than the few he'd sent before. He said he needed to get his life together before he felt

comfortable getting back in contact. I felt helpless. No one could find him during that year. I guess he just didn't want to be found."

"Escort! Escort!" bellowed a burly guard. "Turn around gentlemen!"

Like Pavlov's dog, the men in the chow hall line pivoted around, turning their backs on two other guards and the line of inmates they were walking to medical. Paul and D were mainline; general population. These escorted men were all dressed in bright orange, coming from the cell block known as the Reception Center. They were men new to prison and were waiting to be classified and permanently housed. They had to be segregated from the mainline for security.

It always amazed D that invariably there would be someone in that reception line, and another in the mainline, who would recognize each other from former prison terms. "Hey, what's up dude? Are you back here already? I thought you went home!" "Yeah I got out. But, well, you know how it is home boy. Got caught up and here I am again." Such was typical dialog, shouted as they passed, the men grinning in embarrassment.

Paul grinned at D as they turned back around once the line had passed. "Crazy isn't it? You'd think they would learn not to come back. Those are the type of inmates that the CDCR is focusing on for early release to relieve prison overcrowding!" This was familiar theme among the Lifers.

D thought about it and said, "You know, I hear that official studies show those guys who are the so called low risk offenders come back 70% of the time." Then added "The Department of Corrections lets 'em out early, they screw up and come right back. No wonder the public thinks we're all a bunch of losers. Now, if they were to let out the Lifers who have programmed well and done their time, those same studies show less than 1% of us come back."

Paul quipped, "So, you are saying that not only are those guys who come back to prison over and over again are dumb as rocks, but the CDCR is too?"

D replied, "Yeah! I know, I know it's hard to believe. But it's true. What's that old saying 'Stranger than fiction'?"

Finally reaching the chow hall they entered, remaining in line to get their trays and then headed out to their respective tables. D and Paul both knew they would see each other later on sometime during the day, so a quick wave was all each man offered the other as they parted.

Almost everything in prison seemed to have its ritual. In the chow hall each man sat at a particular table each day. Those other men at that table were your meal partners. Because the men felt relatively comfortable with each other, they knew that if "something" happened they would have each other's backs. The tables were placed very close to each other on purpose to make it difficult for a man to jump up quickly without bumping into another man or table. So you had to be nice and easy.

In prison most everyone sat with their own race, whites with whites, blacks with

blacks, Asians, Mexicans, Native Americans, etc. on down the lineage of the human race. This seemed to occur out of a deeply ingrained habit, although, at Quentin, if you wanted to sit with another race you probably could get away with it. At some prisons however, this was the law of the land and it was strictly enforced. You could find yourself in deep trouble with the other inmates of your own race if you crossed that line.

The chow hall was a wide open affair, with very high ceilings. A guard's gun walk was suspended from the center of the ceiling and ran the entire length of the building. It was used in case a riot broke out below. As dirty as it was with dust and various stuff that the inmates had thrown up onto it, suggested it wasn't used much. D found comfort in noticing this. Riots in prison were never fun. Especially in a place like this that was all steel and concrete.

The old cracked walls were braced with bolted iron. Red quarry tile and the welded steel tables bolted to the floor stretched from wall to wall. The archaic old windows were wide and very tall with rounded tops. They were inset into three of the four walls and let in the morning sun as it rose through their old dirty panes.

Breakfast was a mound of re-constituted potatoes, a robust biscuit that conjured a vision of cowboys on the open range, some Rue based gravy that had way too much flour in it along with some chunks resembling meat. For sure the meat substance was not pork. The inmate Muslim inmate community had long ago lobbied and successfully gotten all pork removed from the states prisons. And of course, also on the tray, was the ever present ladle of hot cereal. This was the infamous Quentin 'SOS' breakfast. You broke up the biscuit, spooned on the potatoes, then lathered on the gravy. It was a pretty filling glob of food and for the most part smelled and tasted OK.

"Good morning fellas'. How's everyone doing this fine morning?" D asked as he sat down.

"Just fine." replied his friend called 'Sarge'. He always seemed to be in a good mood in the morning, unlike some guys, and reminded D a lot of his wife's dad who he had been close to. "What do you have going on for today, D?" Sarge added.

"I've got phone time this morning. Then after that I really don't have much planned. How about you?"

"Well, I think I'll drag old Jim here down to the yard." Sarge replied glancing at the man at the table beside him. Jim was a good guy originally from Michigan, doing time in California and not much of a morning person.

"That's what's NOT going to happen! Well at least not this morning but maybe, just maybe this afternoon." Jim stated firmly as he huddled over his first cup of state coffee. He looked at D and winked.

These two were new friends of D's and were also recent transfers to San Quentin from other prisons. D ate keeping an eye on the time. 8:20 am was his assigned phone time and it was fast approaching. He joked around putting on his happy face for

the fellows at the table. He really enjoyed these guys but kept thinking that had he still been on the streets, the chances he would hang out with guys like these would be virtually Nil.

But now they were his friends, his family, his brothers in arms so to speak. And after all, God made them in his image and likeness. D's faith had taught him that Jesus had given his life for all men. He truly believed this and chastised himself for being judgmental of his fellow inmates in this way.

D headed out of the chow hall, still feeling the lingering weight of 'them old Quentin blues'. He picked up his sack lunch on the way back to the cell block and found his way to his cell. His cellie Dukes had obviously been back but then had left again. D brushed his teeth, put away his lunch and straightened out his bunk. Not having much space to call your own had some benefits. You didn't have room to accumulate things. You kept only what things were essential. D thought it nice to be able to clean up the cell in mere minutes. Not like when he was on the streets.

With some melancholy he thought of the house he used to own with his wife. Where they had lived together, raising their three kids for 19 of their 24 years together. It was a nice house. Two story, three bedrooms, an old craftsman style with a big lot and a pool down in Los Angeles. An enormous sixty foot palm tree had grown in the front yard and twenty one Cyprus trees lined the front walk on either side. He had lost it all.

Since imprisonment his wife had passed away, also his father in law, his step mother and his own father. All of them gone. Some good friends had passed away, too. Death, especially of loved ones, is always painful. But particularly so in prison, where control has been taken from you. When someone died it was most always days, sometimes weeks after the fact that you were told. Like a sucker punch to the gut.

His career, cars, bank account, all possessions, close family members and many friends had been lost. D had really stressed out about this at one time. But faith had sustained him! Perspective was really the monster in the closet. D really missed his family members who had died. But in his heart he knew that they had known he loved them. Most importantly he knew they were in a much better place. He could rest in the knowledge that each one of them had loved God and been at peace at the time of their deaths.

It took enormous effort and many long years to accumulate all of his now long gone worldly possessions. Prison teaches you what is truly important in life, how to live with what you need and the difference between what you need and what you want. "Let it go. *Let it go.*", he used to remind himself. Jesus sent out his disciples to minister. He admonished them to take no extra clothing, no money, nothing, only what they had on their backs. He taught them that they must rely on God to provide.

8:10 a.m. and D ambled down to the bank of telephones against the wall on the

first floor of the cell block. It was quiet in the cavernous building now because it was not 'open unit' - the time when the men could move about freely. At the moment they were either in their cells or at their jobs or otherwise occupied. Only the inmate porters who kept the block in order and clean were out, along with the guards and the few men waiting for their phone times.

D had learned recently that his son was a proud new father. Only five months old, Jonas was the latest addition to the family. *"I've got a new grandson! What a fantastic and wonderful event it must have been for Sean and his wife Joselyn."* D mused.

Yet so far, Jonas was only a name and seemed almost unreal. No photos had been sent. He'd received only his son's last letter announcing the boy's birth and had made a phone call or two. Of course, they talked about the baby and D had congratulated his son, admonishing him on the duties of being a dad and continuing to be a good husband. He had spoken to his daughter in law, too. Even though he hadn't talked to her as much, he sensed she had changed since the baby was born and that her mothering instincts were in full bloom. They had all talked of a visit, but that was still a way off.

The joy of the news of Jonas' birth could so easily be tempered with regrets of how things might have turned out differently. He considered the ripple affect, the vastness of the truth that every action has a reaction. D felt he should have been there more for his kids. He'd missed so much of their lives so far. Now they were having kids.

Wrestling with mental merry-go-rounds like this one was something D was really focused on these days. Again, the monster in the closet was banging at the door trying to get out. Gaining proper perspective was the goal. How to be at peace was a constant petition in his prayers. The past was immutable, unchangeable. It was what it was. He knew it could not be changed. He simply had to accept.

8:20, time to call! He picked up the receiver of his assigned phone and began to dial. There was no dial tone, it was dead. D looked around and saw the other inmates had similar puzzled looks.

"Hey, the phones are dead. What's up?" one of them called down to the guards milling around the guard station.

"Hold on. I'll call over to the tower," came the reply. The minutes passed slowly. "OK, they say they're on now. Check 'em." yelled the guard.

He lifted the receiver to his ear. Yes! D began dialing again. "Please state your name" intoned the computer voice. "Good morning, it's Dad." he replied.

"Please hold" replied the computer and he heard the dial tone become a series of beep tones as his son's number was auto dialed. These were collect calls only, so at this moment the thought always ran through D's mind *"What if my son didn't pay the phone bill."* or *"Maybe the phone company has put a block for some unknown reason."* More stressful thoughts that were yet again challenging his peace of mind

"Hello" he heard his son's voice. Great!

Then they both heard "This is Global Tel-Link. This call will be recorded and monitored. I have a collect call from..." the computer continued... "Press or say 5 to accept..."

Silence! *"What?"*

More silence, then "Your call is being connected."

Ok, a sigh of relief as D felt the anticipation peak.

"Good morning" he said. .

"Good morning Dad." "Did I wake you?"

"No, we're up. I am laying here in the bed with Joselyn and Jonas. Just kicking back and snoozing." Scan replied. "I am going to put you on the speaker, OK Dad?"

"Sure... Hello, can you guys hear me?"

"Loud and clear, Dad."

"Good morning Joselyn."

"Good morning. Say good morning to grandpa, Jonas." Silence.

"Come on Jonas, say good morning." she encouraged.

"This could be the moment," D thought.

"Hi Jonas, its grandpa."

"He's just staring at the phone, Dad. He's a pretty quiet boy most of the time. He's such a great baby."

"Yeah,, I know," thought D, *"he must be. I so wish I could have had a photo, come on kiddo talk to me!"*

Then he heard him! A soft but happy whimper. Then louder and firmer.

"Hi Jonas, its grandpa! Hi buddy... Hey son, does he hear me?"

"He sure does, he's still staring at the phone where your voice is coming out; I moved him just now and he had something to say about it, Dad." said Scan, and Joy laughed.

"Yeah, Jonas, tell your daddy to be more careful!" D heard her say.

They carried on like this for a while, talking about their plans for the day, encouraging Jonas to respond. He did, but only a few times. For D that was enough. They talked about how work was going and of course school, as Joselyn was finishing her nursing degree.

"You have 120 seconds left on this call." interjected the computer.

"Are you kidding, 15 minutes are over already?" complained Scan. "It goes so fast. We miss you Dad. Call me back OK?"

"Son look, I think I better save the call for another day. They are expensive and you guys are a lifeline for me. I don't want to run up the bill you know. I need to know that I can call when I need to. I really miss you guys too."

"Alright. But when are you going to call again, Dad?"

"How about if I called in a few days?"

"Great, same time, early morning?"

"Yes, that's the plan. But you know how it is here. God willing the phones will be

available to us."

"You have 60 seconds left on this call." broke in the computer voice again. "Doesn't that just piss you off, Dad?"

"Nothing we can do. Hey remember we've been 'recorded and monitored'! Big brother is alive and well. I hope whoever is listening gets something out of this call! Love you guys, Love you Jonas!"

They both chimed in "Love you" with Jonas cooing in the background.

Click... it was over. Silence.

After he hung up, he stepped away from the phone and reality stared him in the face. The concrete and steel, the ancient iron bars, the guards, the smells of citricide cleaner and bleach from the mops, the low babble of the cell block. But, now surprisingly, he felt much better, lighter. He realized he no longer felt that oppressive heaviness.

"*I met my grandson.*" That's *what did it*," he thought. Jonas was no longer just a figment, just a thought, just a dream. The little one had officially and completely arrived in D's life. He marveled at it. The fact that all it took was hearing his grandson's voice to lift him above the depressing morass of prison life.

D prayed...

"Thank you God for little Jonas. Though he may never know just how deeply he has touched me just now, I pray dear Lord that you keep him safe and that there will come a day when he and I might share this moment and that he might understand how wonderful you are!"

D exited the cell block with a smile on his face.

Surely the day had begun in God's grace.

* * *

Based on a true story

my father moved through dooms of love
through sames of am through haves of give,
singing each morning out of each night
my father moved through depths of height

— *e.e. cummings*

CONTRIBUTORS

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satnrose is a well-known antiquarian bookseller, and formerly a not-so-secret messenger in the innermost depths of Capitol Hill and K Street. He has been published in a number of literary magazines, but since his reincarnation as 'satnrose' last year, he has been published in EVERGREEN REVIEW, ICONOCLAST, DANSE MACABRE, COUNTEREXAMPLE POETICS, OYSTERS & CHOCOLATE, APPARATUS, GLOOM CUPBOARD, ESCAPE INTO LIFE, BRING THE INK, SHOOTS AND VINES, ESKIMO PIE, BARE BACK, LITERARY TONIC, CLEAN SHEETS, MAD SWIRL, LIT SNACK, METAZEN, etc. and has poems in forthcoming issues of THE ANN ARBOR REVIEW, THE TOWER JOURNAL, FULL OF CROW, etc."

Martin Steele I was born in 1928 and raised in Johannesburg, Republic of South Africa. I was educated at King Edward VII School where I first found my love for words. I settled in Delray Beach, Florida in 1999

My poem "I'm Still Waiting", concerning 9/11, was published in the Great Books Florida News Letter (February 1, 2002) and another poem, "Picture a World Gone By (...11 September 2001)", was included in the September 28, 2001 edition. I was a finalist in the 2003 Winning Writers War Poetry Contest for my epic poem "Sarel and Samson". In the Tom Howard/John H Reid Poetry Contest 2009 I received a Highly Commended award for prose-poem Single Malt. In the same competition 2009 I also had a Very Highly Commended entry, Early, Every Morning. Included in Three Highly Commended entries I had After All, Making Tea and My Brother is a Scarecrow.

I also received a High award in 2008 for my poem Omaha Day One.

In 2008, June 9-15 I was Poet of the Week on the Poetry Super Highway. In 2006 I won first prize on Poetry Place for Lost tears.

My epic poem The Eyes in the Photo was published in PSH, for Holocaust Remembrance day Issue May 2008.

In the Dancing Poetry Festival Competition edition September 2007 I won second prize in San Francisco, for my poem "Urgineaa Maritama".

My poem "Big Tent Game" was published in anthology Traveling, Tom Howard Books. Sailing In the Mist of Time a collection of award winning poems --- Margaret Reid Prize for traditional verse embraced my poem Service and Set with a High Distinction

remark and prize.

Coyote Wild Magazine in November 2006 published My Brother is a Scarecrow.

In 2007 I was a finalist in the War Poetry Competition sponsored by Winning Writers, with my poem "Can We Believe Them?".

My poem Encased rated a mention in 2008 in the Margaret Reid Traditional Verse competition.

In 2007 my piece "The man in the Window" was published by *Ginosko*.

My poem Lost Tears: Copyright 2005. This poem won the summer 2005 competition from Write On Copy

Kathleen Hellen's work has appeared in *Barrow Street*; *The Cortland Review*; the *Hollins Critic*; *Nimrod*; *Prairie Schooner*; *Southern Poetry Review*; and *Subtropics*, among other journals.

Awards include the *Washington Square Review*, *James Still* and *Thomas Merton* poetry prizes, and individual artist grants from the state of Maryland and the city of Baltimore. Other awards include: finalist in the Autumn House Competition; the Kore Press First Book Competition, the *Many Mountains Moving* Flash Fiction Contest; the Marlboro Prize for Poetry; the Pablo Neruda Poetry Prize, *Nimrod/Hardman Awards*; and the Slapering Hol Chapbook Contest.

She is contributing editor for the *Baltimore Review*.

Cade Collum I was born and raised in Slapout, Alabama. I received my B.A. in Psychology as well as my M.F.A. in Creative Writing (Poetry) from the University of Alabama, where I also worked for several years as a Research Assistant in the Psychology Department and in local nursing homes. I currently live in Tuscaloosa, where I am a full-time Instructor in the English Department at UA.

My poems have appeared in *The Dogs of Havana* (chapbook, Red Hydra Press 2008), *42opus*, and *Vulcan*. I am currently working on another chapbook project with Red Hydra Press titled *Lion-froth Crown* to be published in summer 2010.

Gabor G Gyukics (b. 1958 Budapest, Hungary) is a Hungarian-American poet, literary translator. He has published 1 book of poetry in English and 4 books of poetry in Hungarian. He has published 8 books of poetry translations including *A Transparent Lion*, selected poetry of Attila Jozsef (Green Integer Books, LA) with co-translator Michael Castro. At present he is residing in Vienna, Austria.

Allanah Hunt is eighteen years of age and has been writing for nearly three years. She has nearly finished an Advanced Editing and Writing course through college and is looking at doing a Bachelor in Creative Writing.

Allanah has written many short stories as well as some poetry and is currently working on a novel which she hopes to publish one day in the near future.

Jasmon Drain The United States' involvement in "conflicts" with the supposed purpose of "liberating oppressed people" has consumed the majority of pages in history books taught throughout U.S. high schools. But, through those efforts of liberation, United States soldiers' lives are being sacrificed all the while. There is little mention of those soldiers amongst these books. Jasmon Drain would like to dedicate *Grey Apples, Sugar Milk, Waiting* to any person who may have lost someone to military conflict.

Stacey Bryan I currently reside in Burbank, California with my husband whom I met in New York. I have lived on both coasts working as a caption editor for the hearing impaired and am currently at work on a short story collection concerned with life in Los Angeles.

I received my BA in English Lit. from UCLA and was also published in their Journal of the Arts, *Westwind*. While living in New York, I was published in the *Brownstone Review*.

Rebecca Mertz will receive an MFA from the University of Pittsburgh in April. Her poems are forthcoming in *H_NGM_N, Praxilla, Otoliths*, sawbuck, and an upcoming anthology entitled How Dirty Girls Get Clean. She is a graduate of Franciscan University of Steubenville, and recently wrote the preface for the latest edition of John J. McNeill's Freedom, Glorious Freedom: The Spiritual Journey for Gays, Lebsians and Everybody Else. She's a founding editor of the new poetry journal, *A Joint Called Pauline* [<http://ajointcalledpauline.wordpress.com>].

Allan Kaplan Besides cooking for wife, actively writing poetry and passively watching taped movies in NYC and in the Catskill mountains: Books: Paper Airplane (Harper & Row) Like One of Us (Untitled). Appeared in many journals over the years, including *Poetry, Oyez, Locus Solus, Apalachee Quarterly, Paris Review, Chelsea Review, Slant, Hubbub, Iowa Review, Washington Square, Heaven Bone, Sal Mimeo, Oyez, Fine Madness, Wind, Free Lunch, Gulf Stream, Widener Review*.

Sarah Rehfeldt lives in western Washington with her family. She is a writer, artist, and photographer. Her most recent publication credits include: *Modern Haiga; Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction; The Golden Lantern; Ascent Aspirations Magazine, and DailyHaiga*. Her photography web pages can be viewed here: www.pbase.com/candanceski

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Tree Riesener has published poetry and short fiction in numerous literary magazines, including *Flashquake, Flash Fiction Online, Litsnack, The Evergreen Review, Loch Raven Review, Pindeldyboz, Identity Theory, The Belletrist Review, and The Source*.

Her achievements include three first prizes for the Short-Short Story and the Literary Short Story at the Philadelphia Writers Conference, Finalist for Black Lawrence Press's Hudson Prize, Finalist in *PANK* magazine's Fiction Chapbook Contest, Best of Wigleaf 2009 (Honorable Mention), Semi-Finalist in the Pablo Neruda Competition, three short stories staged in the Writing Aloud productions of InterAct Theatre, Philadelphia, a Hawthornden International Writing Fellowship, two Pushcart nominations, and the William Van Wert Fiction Award. She is the author of three poetry collections, *Inscapes*, *Angel Poison* and *Liminalog*. Her website is <http://www.treeriesener.com> and she blogs at <http://www.treeriesener.blogspot.com>.

Yelena Dubrovin I am the author of two books of poetry "Preludes to the Rain" and "Beyond the Line of No Return". I co-authored with Hilary Koprowski a novel *In Search of Van Dyck*. In addition to this, my short stories, poetry and literary essays appeared in different periodicals, such as *The World Audience*, *Gold Dust*, *63 Channels*, *Ben Pint Quarterly*, *Cantaraville*, *Ginosko Literary Journal*, *Bewildering Stories*, *Pens on Fire*, *Ekhashara*, *Ophelia Street* and etc. I was born in St. Petersburg, Russia and since 1979 live in Philadelphia, PA. I am a bilingual writer, published in two languages, Russian and English.

John Sandoval has earned his daily bread as fire fighter, gold miner, painter of houses. From these occupations, and from idling about on street corners and in saloons, he has drawn his inspiration. He is presently residing in Cleveland, Ohio, where he is employed as late night desk clerk at the historical Alcazar Hotel.

Edward Butscher author of first bios of Sylvia Plath and Conrad Aiken, as well as several volumes of verse. The most recent of the latter is *Eros Descending*, due out this month from the Amagansett Press.

Phoebe Wilcox lives in eastern Pennsylvania. Her novel, *Angels Carry the Sun* is pending publication with Lilly Press, and an excerpt from a second novel, *Flower Symbolism for Dummies*, has been published in *Wild Violet*. Recent and forthcoming work may be found in *Sixers Review*, *Illumen*, *A cappella Zoo*, *Folly Magazine*, *The Chaffey Review*, *Calliope Nerve*, *The Battered Suitcase*, *Frostwriting*, *Gloom Cupboard* and many others. Her stories have twice been nominated for the Pushcart prize. www.phoebewilcox.com.

Michael Estabrook is a baby boomer who began getting his poetry published in the late 1980s. Over the years he has published 15 poetry chapbooks, his most recent entitled "They Didn't Leave Notes." Other interests include art, music, theatre, opera, and his wife who just happens to be the most beautiful woman he has ever known.

Allegra Jostad Silberstein was born on a farm in Wisconsin. Her love of poetry began as a child when her mom would recite nursery rhymes while she was working. She also loves dance and performs with several groups. More than 100 poems have been published in journals such as BLUE UNICORN, RATTLESNAKE PRESS, POETRY NOW, IODINE, GINOSKO and others. She has two chapbooks: ACCEPTANCE (1999) and IN THE FOLDS (2005). In February of 2010 she was named Poet Laureate of the city of Davis in California.

Lyn Lifshin Books: THE LICORICE DAUGHTER: MY YEAR WITH RUFFIAN, Texas Review Press, ANOTHER WOMAN WHO LOOKS LIKE ME from Black Sparrow at Godine., following COLD COMFORT and BEFORE IT'S LIGHT, DESIRE and 92 RAPPLER. She has over 120 books & edited 4 anthologies. Also out recently: NUTLEY POND, PERSEPHONE, BARBARO: BEYOND BROKENNESS, LOST IN THE FOG, LIGHT AT THE END, JESUS POEMS and BALLET MADONNAS, KATRINA, LOST HORSES. forthcoming: CHIFFON, ALL THE POETS WHO HAVE TOUCHED ME, LIVING AND DEAD. ALL TRUE: ESPECIALLY THE LIES and BALLROOM. Her web site is www.lynlifshin.com

Kristin Roedell graduated from Whitman College in 1984 (B.A. English) and the University of Washington Law School (J.D. 1987). She practiced law in Kitsap County Washington, and is now retired. Her poetry has appeared in Switched on Gutenberg, Ginosko, Flutter, Damselflypress, Chantarelle's Notebook, Eclectica, Quill and Parchment (featured poet January 2010) Open Minds Quarterly, Breath and Shadow, and Four and Twenty. Other poems will appear in Chest, Ekphrasis, and Pilgrimage. Her chapbook Seeing in the Dark was published in 2009 by Tomato Can Press. She is a member of Poets and Writers Association, and the co-editor of an Anthology of Poems on Motherhood, scheduled to be published through Quill and Parchment Press in summer 2010.

Rachel Day: I sketch and study languages as hobbies. I write because life doesn't feel right without it.

Allan Johnston's poems have been published in *Poetry*, *Poetry East*, *Rhino*, and over sixty other journals. He is the author of Tasks of Survival (Mellen, 1996) and the chapbook Northport (Finishing Line Press, 2010), and is a recipient of an Illinois Arts Council Fellowship, a Pushcart Prize nomination (2009), and first prize in the Outrider Press Literary Anthology Poetry Awards (2010). Originally from California, he earned his M.A. in Creative Writing and his Ph.D. in English from the University of California, Davis, and now teaches writing and literature at Columbia College and DePaul University in Chicago. He currently serves as a reader for the Illinois Emerging Poets competition and is president of the Society for the Philosophical Study of Education. In

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L.B. Sedlacek's poems have appeared in such publications as "Audience Magazine," "I-70 Review," "Bear Creek Haiku," "Tales of the Talisman," "Illumen," "Heritage Writer," "Tertulia Magazine," "Inspirit," "Assisi Journal," "MamaZine," and "Poesia." L.B.'s latest chapbook is "Red Headed Eskimos." L.B. also hosts the small press podcast "Coffee House to Go." lbedlacek@gmail.com

Gila Lyons has written for Tablet, the Forward, the New York Press, and the *Berkshire Review*, among others. She is a staff writer at Go Ask Alice and a voyeurism correspondent for The Faster Times. Gila has taught creative writing in schools and for adults, has lead residential writing retreats, and has created and facilitated writing workshops aimed at using writing as a therapeutic tool. She lives in New York City, where she is an MFA candidate in literary nonfiction at Columbia University.

Joseph Farley edited *Axe Factory* for 24 years. His books and chapbooks include *For The Birds*, *Suckers*, *The True Color of You* and *Longing For The Mother Tongue*. Recent stories and poems have appeared in *Nefarious Ballerina*, *Gutter Eloquence*, *Snakeskin*, *BlazeVOX*, *Medulla Review* and other places.

Maria Terrone is the author of two poetry collections: *A Secret Room in Fall*, co-winner of the McGovern Prize (Ashland Poetry Press, 2006) and *The Bodies We Were Loaned* (The Word Works, 2002) as well as a chapbook, *American Gothic, Take 2* (Finishing Line Press, 2009). Her Pushcart Prize-nominated work has appeared in magazines including *Poetry*, *Atlanta Review*, *Hudson Review* and *Poetry International*, and in more than a dozen anthologies. She is Assistant Vice President for Communications at Queens College, City University of New York. Visit her at mariaterrone.com

Judith Cody's poetry has won national awards from *Atlantic Monthly* and *Amelia*; honorable mentions from the *Emily Dickinson Poetry Award*, a poem (in English and Spanish) with its complete archives is in the Smithsonian Institution's permanent collection, three poems were quarter-finalists in *The Pablo Neruda Prize in Poetry*, and poems took honorable mention from the *National League of American Pen Women*. A poem was awarded the "Conference Find," top distinction, at the Southern California Writers Conference. Poems appear in journals such as: *Nimrod*, *New York Quarterly*, *South Carolina Poetry Review*, *Caduceus*, *Poet Lore*, *Xavier Review*, *Texas Review*, *Primavera*, *Phoebe*, *Fugue*, *Louisville Review*, *Madison Review*, *Eureka Literary Magazine*, *Westview*, *Rio Grande Review*, *Binnacle*, *Carquinez Review*, *Fox Cry Review*, *Rattlesnake Review*, *Poem*, *Arabesque*, *RiverSedge*, *Distillery*, *Phantasmagoria*, *Limestone*, and many others. Poems are anthologized in: *Meridian*

Anthology of Contemporary Poetry 2007, Oakland Out Loud 2007, Words Upon the Waters 2006, and Anthology of Monterey Bay Poets 2007. Books are: *Vivian Fine: A Bio-Bibliography*, Greenwood Press, 2002; *Eight Frames Eight*, poems; *Roses in Portraiture*, photography, Kikimora Publishing Co., 2008 . She is a UC Master Gardener, and she composes guitar music. www.judithcody.com

Cheryl Clarke is a black lesbian poet whose writing has appeared in numerous publications since 1980. Recent books are *AFTER MECCA: WOMEN POETS AND THE BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT* in 2005 and *THE DAYS OF GOOD LOOKS: PROSE AND POETRY 1980-2005*, in 2006.

D Krizman is an inmate at San Quentin State Prison, California.