



# The Louisville Review

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The  
Louisville  
Review

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## *The Louisville Review*

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*TLR* publishes two volumes each year: spring and fall. Submissions of previously unpublished manuscripts are invited. Please submit online through our submissions manager: [www.louisvillereview.org/submissions](http://www.louisvillereview.org/submissions). Prose submissions should be double-spaced and page numbered. Poetry (up to 5 poems) need not be double-spaced; multiple poems should be submitted in one document. Drama should appear in standard format. Please include your name on every page. If you are submitting in more than one genre, please submit documents separately. We encourage you to include a cover letter in the comments section. Our editorial staff reads year around. Simultaneous submissions accepted. Payment is in copies. Email address: [louisvillereview@spalding.edu](mailto:louisvillereview@spalding.edu). Children/teen (K-12) poetry and fiction must be accompanied by parental permission to publish if accepted. Reply time is 4-6 months.

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## Editor's Note

Congratulations are due Marcia Woodruff Dalton, whose first novel *The Ice Margin*, will be published this spring by the Fleur-de-Lis Press of *The Louisville Review*. Set on Cape Cod, this beautifully written novel is about how people connect to place in a fulfilling way, even when human connections falter. Contact our office for information about how to order *The Ice Margin*.

This summer (2010) will find the Spalding University brief-residency MFA in Writing convening in Buenos Aires, where the season will be winter, discussing (among many other topics/workshops/readings) work that has appeared in recent issues of *The Louisville Review*. I like to think that the contents of our literary magazine are suitable for all seasons and represent diverse points of view. In Buenos Aires, faculty who have served as Guest Editors will talk about why they have chosen the selections they did in terms of subject matter, structure, and style. How a chosen selection fulfills the requirements of form, that is, its unity and uniqueness, will also be a matter of discussion. I wish you could join us. All of our MFA students gain editorial experience by considering submissions to this magazine, published twice a year. In 2011, the MFA summer residency will be held near Sienna, Italy, with a side trip to Florence. Our fall and spring residencies meet in Louisville, and our students can choose to mix and match these locations as they wish.

On a personal note, let me mention that my new novel *Adam & Eve* (set in the future, in the year 2020) will go on sale September 28, and it can be pre-ordered through the web sites of Morrow-HarperCollins, Barnes & Noble, amazon.com, and other outlets, and I will be available for promotional readings throughout much of the fall.

I wish to thank our Guest Editors for their work in making possible this issue of TLR:

**Silas House**, creative nonfiction guest editor, is the author of four novels: *Clay's Quilt* (2001), *A Parchment of Leaves* (2003), *The Coal Tattoo* (2005), and *Eli the Good* (2009) and a work of creative nonfiction, *Something's Rising* (co-written with Jason Howard, 2009). A new play, *Long Time Traveling*, premiered in April 2009. He is a contributing editor for *No Depression* magazine, where he has done long features on such artists as Lucinda Williams, Nickel Creek, Buddy Miller, Kelly Willis, and many others. Silas is a two-time finalist for the Southern Book Critics Circle Prize, a two-time winner of the Kentucky Novel of the Year, the Appalachian Book of the Year, the Chaffin Prize for Literature, the Award for Special Achievement from

the Fellowship of Southern Writers, the Appalachian Writer of the Year, and many other honors. In 2009, Emory and Henry College presented the Silas House literary festival in honor of Silas's body of work.

**A. J. Naslund**, poetry guest editor, has enjoyed a career as a university English professor, teaching in the U.S., in Japan, and in South Korea. He has academic degrees from the University of Montana (Missoula, Montana—BA and MA) and the University of Louisville (PhD). His work has appeared in such journals as *Caesura*, *Lalitamba*, *upstreet*, *Abiko Annual* (Japan), *Best Poem* (online <http://bestpoem.wordpress.com>), *HotmetalPress* (online <http://hotmetalpress.net>), *Ceramics Monthly*, *The Louisville Review*, and others. His book of poems, *Silk Weather* (1999) was published by Fleur-de-lis Press at Spalding University, and his poetry appears in the anthology *Living in Storms*, edited by Thom Schramm, Western Washington University Press, 2008. In 1990 he was awarded an Al Smith Fellowship for excellence in fiction writing by the Kentucky Humanities Council.

**Charlie Schulman** is a playwright and screenwriter. His play *Character Assassins* will receive its World Premier at NJ Rep this fall. Charlie and composer/lyricist Michael Roberts are the creators of the musical *The Fartiste* (Best Musical NYC Fringe 2006). His chapter on Playwriting is included in *The Portable MFA in Creative Writing* (Writers Digest).

**Luke Wallin**, fiction guest editor, holds an MFA in Fiction Writing from the Iowa Writers Workshop. His stories have appeared widely in journals and anthologies, and he has published eight young adult novels. He has taught fiction writing at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, University College Dublin, and, since 2001, in Spalding's MFA program. His story "Monster" appeared in the March 2010 issue of *Moon Milk Review*, an online literary journal specializing in magical realism.

**Betsy Woods**, a Spalding MFA alum and guest editor for *The Children's Corner*, is a writer and editor for NASA and interns at the Covenant House in New Orleans. Her short stories have appeared in *The New Orleans Review*, *The Louisville Review*, *The Literary Trunk*, and *Alive Now*. She is a contributing writer for *Sophisticated Woman* magazine, served as assistant editor for the organic farming magazine, *Acres U.S.A.*, and was a columnist and feature writer for *The Times Picayune*. She teaches at The Writer's Loft of Middle Tennessee State University.

—Sena Jeter Naslund, Editor

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## Andrew Najberg

### CITY SO FRACTURED

I.

An alleyway in Barcelona  
Graffiti on the pull-down steel shutter over the front of Club Valhalla

might be  
a fish  
might not

hard to say this kind of thing without sand and water

might be a truck  
with one really big eye  
and triangles in its mouth

II.

In the old frescoes  
all the angels' wings have eyes  
and half their faces are missing  
though many of the faces still have both  
wings

somewhere once hung an image  
of a man's head being sawed in half by angels  
on either side  
of a two-handed tree saw

so few jobs worth doing  
require two to complete them  
so how happy  
they must have been  
at last

III.

In Park Guell

it's all pillars and bridges

mosaics

eggs and jubilant lizards

and it seems clear that

the clear sky says

the park is Gaudi's real Sagrada Familia

from an aerial view

maybe God

finally found something

to believe in

this is the time for applause

it used to be so sad

that the divine

had no one to pray to

IV.

We are all watchtowers around La Plaza Espanya

but we are not the shining brass of our trumpets

In 15 minutes

we will sew ourselves into satchels

and hang from hooks by straps from the walls

when the wind blows us rocking

our shadows will wobble on the graffiti

it takes a long time

become a Spanish song

but it must look like

it took only an instant

**Sherry Chandler**

**A BACKWOODS ROUNDEAU**

Into the wilds of Kentucky, into the gloom  
of the primal forest, Rebecca brought her loom.  
Daniel brought Ticklicker to show his pluck,  
to pay his bills by bringing home the bucks.  
Together they would make the Bluegrass bloom

sweep the savages away with a new broom,  
strike it rich in the forest-felling boom.  
But soon the speculators ran amuck  
into the wilds of Kentucky.

Too soon Transylvania was strewn  
with worthless deeds made out to Daniel Boone.  
Rebecca, tossing on her mattress shuck  
that cold winter in her three-faced shack  
wondered why she ever followed her old groom  
into the wilds of Kentucky.

## Martha Christina

### PRIMING

My older cousins stood back,  
let me, just turned six,  
have the first try. They  
promised our summer thirst  
would be quenched,

but what gushed  
from the reluctant pump  
was dark and winged,  
its blue-black body  
a splash of pain  
on my hand  
quick as a kiss,  
the red surprise  
blooming.

## Samantha Thornhill

### ODE TO JEZEBEL'S SONG

Jezebel always wore  
the same pantyhose to mass—  
the jet black ones with control top  
& run longer than Euphrates

Her jello bottom jiggled  
under Sunday dress

Altar boys hid  
hard ons in folds of robes

Mummy turned  
my face into her paisley hip

Jezebel winked  
at men with her left eye  
their wives with her right  
then kissed their babies

Secrets slept  
on her taste buds like peppermints

No wife's perfume matched  
her menstrual musk

*How yuh letters, gyul* she asked  
me once under Mummy's  
heating lamp glare

I said fine

Once she stuck out

her tongue at Father who slipped  
Jesus's body gingerly into her mouth  
Everyone listened  
for the Eucharist's dissolve

The organ even stopped

Rumor had it she transformed  
a broomstick into a microphone  
at that *place*

Every Sunday I waited  
for her eruption into a smoky song

But she didn't even sing  
Our Father just hummed  
& swayed, hummed  
& swayed

Even her bee  
language was beautiful  
the women who lived  
inside Uncle's black box  
jazz singers, their voices  
curving roads

Whenever she didn't balance  
in on Saturday night heels and sun rays  
Sundays weren't quite as candid

Maybe it was the erections or her  
romantic imperfections—  
river snaking down her leg  
pigeon toed stroll  
bleeding dancing shoes  
thick custard grin

Maybe it was the altar  
boys who longed to taste  
February on her breath  
or the wives with eyes  
that could sharpen pencils

Maybe it was me and the others  
who reached home, dusted  
off our mother's high heels  
licking red pistachio shells  
just for the lipstick

She never sang the Our Father  
just hummed & swayed  
hummed & swayed

I always wondered  
what song she lodged there

Deep wind caught  
in the throat of a valley



## Samantha Thornhill

### FROGS AND BEES

When I see a jar of tomato sauce, I smell Mummy's garden  
where we trapped  
bees in our glass canisters with holes punched into the lids  
so they wouldn't  
suffocate like us in the house that summer we behaved  
like imps in church  
so Mummy made us do jigsaw puzzles of oars and penguins.  
So we ambushed  
the bees, armed with our glass rotundas, faces ripped off,  
hollows drained  
of pulpy tomato innards now oozing from the garbage bag  
in the kitchen  
where Mummy churned the mango ice-cream Port of Spain  
craved like crack  
rock. Oh how we wished to entrap the fireflies romancing  
night  
with their candlelight torsos—fat chance, especially after  
that day,  
after the sharp exclamation of our natural names cut  
through us  
like a discordant cow-bell, after we tried to re-enter back  
door incognito  
even though she awaited us at its threshold like Charon  
at the lip of death,  
brandishing the wounded trash bag dripping tomato pain  
onto linoleum.  
Tell me you wouldn't rather be blinded by a frog too, than  
to see the look  
on my mother's face that day. Because it's been said that  
the frogs in Trinidad  
can forever blind you with their flying venom, and I am still  
afraid of frogs.

## Gaylord Brewer

### BARBARO

By second replay of its reigned, fraught stumble  
across combed track, ankle flapping horribly wrong  
angles, I realize I am sitting in the same chair,  
my wife on the cushion of loveseat, as the morning  
the towers collapsed. When I look, she is crying again.  
I have set my glass on its coaster although  
I do not remember this. I recognize, though, a dense,  
liquified quality to the air, the unfamiliar aspects  
of my living room, prints and paintings hung straight,  
photograph of stallions galloping in moonlight  
Claudia's owned since childhood. We've no classes today,  
as we did then, this being Saturday and summer,  
time of ease and sport, but agree without speaking  
to dress and find a crowd. The drive, too, is mostly silent.  
Before we left, on-line reports already conjectured  
"multiple fractures," "please pray," and worse.  
When we stop at the Indians' store for forgotten wine,  
I wait outside. At remodeled Bangkok Cuisine,  
I can't drink, can't swallow the inky tempranillo,  
eat without incident lemongrass and coconut milk soup,  
phad thai with fried tofu, my wife's favorite meal.  
It does taste good. I ingest most of what's put before me  
and manage one churlish monologue about infants  
and parents being allowed in public, or even to live.  
We admire the hardwood floors installed (a bargain  
at \$30,000, rumor has it) by the chef's husband  
and polished to such sheen planks to me seem fabricated.  
For no good reason, I tuck my fortune into a pocket  
without sharing, although immediately I've forgotten  
its instruction. Then we tip heavily and can go.  
Here is what I'm telling you: we cork a nearly full bottle  
and I steer carefully, car top up, though I do feel

one moment of illogical panic regarding the dog's welfare.  
Home. No news on the Internet. We watch  
the end of a laughter TV disaster movie, earthquake  
cracking California to island, go to bed facing oppositely.  
And the last of it: Long window dressings of lightning;  
for hours, artillery of thunder rattling empty sky.  
What, finally?: At 3:47 a.m. rain and hail arrived, siege  
on the house began. I heard hooves against our roof,  
gutters overwhelmed, and suppose Claudia did, too.  
The Gods of War. Were there ever another kind?

**Erin Keane**

## **A HISTORY EXAM**

This is what I know about ghosts: they are selfish. They are books with hollow insides.

They live off memorials, steal carbon dioxide from yahrzeit candles they can't even use. They

are unbidden. She in my house and only the men could see her. He pulling my young mother back

from the wreck. They are small as a cat's plush toy, as any real mouse. They haunt baseboards,

they squeak your car brakes. They are hungry for your favorite shawl. In the ghosted house,

everything woolen was ridden round. Drawn to our lights, when they take body we mistake

them for moths, a dozen paper bodies in morbid ashen heap. They want to be us, and they will be.

**Patty Boss**

**THROTTLE ME, LIKE A MOTORCYCLE**

You, delicate alien, thin fingers,  
you—delicate. How can you be so under control?  
You barefoot toe print maker,  
you glider fighter, visionary rider.  
You delicate, you delicate.

While painted cars roll in droves,  
coast through lengthened lights, below,  
green, red, green, makes no difference to me

while stacks and rows of red aligned taillights  
head for their buildings, bars, homes, ho's,  
wives, dogs, lonely empty bedroom rows,  
bottle of rum, home-rolled cigarette,  
swirly painted periwinkle sky,  
the glowing orange spots of Russian Hill lights.

You float around in me, day after day,  
sometimes bumping into the insides of my head and heart,  
like a floating, roaming balloon let loose, up into the sky.

But some days, you take hold of me, right above the gut.  
Some days, you take hold, and throttle me like a motorcycle.  
The revving vibration stirs me up, beginning in my thighs,  
travels up my navel, into my nipples,  
then up around my neck, ending in my tongue.

And so I exhale with a burst, a tolerance surpassed.  
I exhale with the surprise of what you can do to me.  
Then, I pause, and take that moment, that effect,  
I scoop it up with my palms;  
hold it in a sphere, as it emits heat.  
I let it dance on the wooden table,  
painted with orange interstellar skies.

**Lisa Verigin**

**OH, DON'T LET'S ASK**

They visited the Lion's Den,  
QT's and other boy bars,  
but he couldn't even snag  
an alley job or back-room blow.  
Or didn't especially want one.  
So he and she returned to the car,  
stealing, from porch pots along the way,  
fistfuls of flowers she knew  
her girlfriend would not embrace that night.  
For she thought this might be the night  
she'd longed for since she was 17 and sunk  
inexplicably in lust with this man  
with the talky voice and balletic hands.

They drove the neoned city, wondering  
what to do next. He fondled her hand,  
then her upper thigh. She lifted  
his hand and smartly sang,  
"I crave affection, but not when I drive."  
So she took them out to the beach and parked  
under the night-drenched summer fog.  
He climbed on top of her  
and they gobbled each other's faces  
and necks and ears  
like unblistered chicken hearts.  
He whispered, "Sugar-dad will be asleep.  
Let's go home."

So they did, to the tri-storied manse  
on the eastern edge of Golden Gate Park.  
They rolled around in the antique dark.  
She buzzed, "Fuck me like I'm a boy."  
And he did.

In late-morning sun, they headed down  
to her old 'hood for books  
and French toast and bacon. They finally spoke  
of the films they'd watched the day before.  
Both favored *Now, Voyager*,  
though she admitted to not recalling  
most of it now, could only think  
of Bette's first incarnation,  
thick-eyebrowed and frumpily lumpy,

before Paul Henreid,  
before the moon and the stars,  
when her world was a room,  
hidden books, careful scrimshaw.  
"Something about rough Bette . . . ," she said  
and talked, talked and talked.

**Deanna Boulard**

## **DIRECTIONS TO MY HOUSE**

Go away from the sun in the morning  
and towards it after noon. This will be easier  
by foot, so bring a backpack that will carry  
seeds and granola, dried cranberries and jerky,  
along with an extra pair of jeans, a tarp, a rope,  
your mother's brown sweater, and a flashlight.

I suggest that you start in May, as it will take  
ninety-one days to get here, that is,  
if you keep a good pace. Be sure to pick berries  
when you can, and look for the Indian potato  
I showed you last year. If you must, stop  
at a corner store. Avoid highways and big towns,

since they have always distracted you.  
Once you are over the mountains, the land  
will settle by degrees, until you near the end  
of Illinois, and the horizon begins to widen.  
Then you will be in corn fields, where the stalks  
are taller than you, and if you cannot go straight,

you may follow Highway Eighty. You will pass  
the river and Iowa City, and when you get close  
to Cedar Rapids, keep the sun's rising on the side  
of your good eye, and its setting on the side of  
the other. Take the gravel road past Swisher,  
and when you come to the gas station with

the green door, you will know that the oaks  
around the vanished house, you will know  
that they are very close, and you will turn  
toward the place where they buried me.  
Come and sit on the long grass and  
let me see the sun's markings on your face.



**Barbara Buckman Strasko**

**BECOMES ME**

Dense trees and bird calls—  
the forest is not  
where it should be

not where my mother  
asked me  
to follow the river below  
the high ridge

the cottage door  
the chair sliding closer  
not knowing how

I sweep until the dust  
becomes breath  
try to stay here  
a life time

collect daffodils for the table.  
Now daylilies  
and words arranged in pollen  
on the enamel table.

The chair sliding closer  
to the table  
my hair still red, legs freckled  
the mole above the lip  
still marks

the kind of loneliness  
I seek and seek  
and try to sweep  
away.

## Reid Bush

### WEEDING

Where we live  
now,  
weeding our garden on hands and knees  
is nothing like the hands and knees weeding  
of childhood.

Now  
either or both hands  
can be thrust without thinking  
into dense clumps of weeds ahead  
while we dream our dreams—

then more—

each dream adding its own color to pleasure—  
a color  
that just the act of weeding simply can't.

Now, where we are,  
there's never a need to interrupt dreaming  
to consider how easily the next handful  
could bring with it sudden writhing—  
a loosening coil of twisting muscle  
we call *snake*—  
his bead of eye fastened unblinkingly  
on childhood fear.

## Reid Bush

### PANK MATTINGLY WAS A BIG DISAPPOINTMENT

There his name was on the jar of honey we'd bought at Paul's,  
his name—with that first one—Pank—we'd never seen—or heard  
of—  
toward the bottom of the jar and right above the number  
we phoned to ask if we could come and buy some honey  
there?

And he said Yes.  
And told us how to come.  
And said it'd probably be about 10 miles.

And there he was waiting at the door with the two quarts and two  
pints we'd ordered.

And that was it—except for the 10 miles back the same way we'd  
come.

No taking us out to see the hives where his bees had buzzed till there  
was honey.

No closed-eyed, head-back conjecturing with us about where his  
bees just might have  
gone to collect the golden dots of pollen for our batch. No holding  
hands around a hive  
and praising God for bees.

Nothing.

There he was waiting at the door with our four jars in a cardboard  
box.

And that was it at Pank's.

And if you say I simply should have said “disappointment” in the  
title and left out “big”  
so as not to overdo things, then I just say we plainly start with  
different expectations  
regarding anyone named Pank.

## Joel Long

### PINE FOREST

*Hasegawa Tohaku, 16<sup>th</sup> Century*

It is not the trees but looking that's flawed.

The mind is so much

water moving through.

But those trees, solid in the mist, burst in wood

from some bright center, that moist white light

stained with wheat. The bark rasps the air

as the needles divide it. I will not claim this wind inside.

I do not know where it comes

from or through,

which branches it has brought to wave in

the wet air. When the wind observes, it does not record,

so I am sorry for myself and this

clinging I do,

this fear like jagged stone, crystals cut, bound.

But beneath is a golden blank like joy but not joy,

carelessness I sometimes

feel but cannot name,

that the trees are true there in the blurry mist

that seeing them emerge in some pocket of vision

is rare as seeing always is, water pouring through stone.

## Sue Terry Driskell

### WHAT RISES, WHAT FALLS AWAY

Like a fish asleep in the sea  
you turn in the starless black of the room,  
rise, descend dark stairs to the space below—  
walk in your sleep—maybe.

I'm not sure.

But you soon return, fall back in bed,  
dream of the crescent moon  
as it descends the western sky,  
falls from sight,

unlike the great blue heron  
that rises before us from the Elkhorn—  
good luck we've always thought.

Today, it makes three wide loops around our canoe  
as we exult in its reappearance,  
its vast wing span, the still dark trees,  
swift water churning white before us.

We read the rocks, slip between,  
take the waves far on around the bend—  
limestone cliffs towering overhead.

## Jeff Simpson

### INTO SOIL

Where the green paint flakes from the hood and doors,  
where daybreak illuminates the dirty streets,

where dogs no longer bark but lie quietly in the grass,  
is where the mystery ends and something like pain begins,

as the best of my intentions are lifted like fingerprints  
from a wine glass, a smug kiss pressed upon the windshield

of a '53 Ford Victoria rusting against the fence line.  
And the killdeer building its nest, and the mothers feeding

their young, and the sprinklers watering the lawns.  
Can you hear it? Can you hear the static on the TV,

the rattle and hum of gunfire? Are you listening  
from where you last left the lilacs blooming

in despair for a shooting star, for that western dream  
some say still lingers over the dark, middleclass skies

of Ohio, Indiana, Missouri—Kansas, Oklahoma,  
Texas? Nerves singing. Bodies singing as the heart

erodes into soil, as the river rises then departs like steam,  
like mist in the woods where moss grows thick among

the detritus and tall pines that rise sixty feet  
before branching toward the bright decaying stars.

**Pat Owen**

**GOING TO SEE THE BUDDHA**

Through his thin shirt, I can feel  
the rise and fall of his ribs.  
I know nothing of him  
except he has a motor bike.  
He knows nothing of me  
except I look like a rich American.

Holding on as he weaves through traffic  
like a tadpole swimming  
against the current, I sway  
away from cars and bikes,  
inches away. Waves  
of motor scooters sweep around us.  
Part of a stream of honking

cars and headlights, we snake  
through oncoming traffic. A child  
on a nearby bike smiles at me.  
As though this is happening  
to someone else, I smile back.

No one knows  
where I am. My fanny pack holds  
my passport, credit cards, all  
my cash. Fear rises up my spine;  
I've been traveling  
too long and far.

Where  
is he taking me?

Are we lost?  
He says no, no and points to



the huge Buddha towering  
over all the skyscrapers.  
Even with no common language,  
somehow we communicate.

As we pull up, little girls rush up to greet me  
wanting to know where I'm from—  
no, not California; no, not New York;  
and no, no postcards—  
although I do give to the local beggars.  
It seems only right to fill a begging bowl—  
I'm going to see the Buddha.

Fearful of the thickening dusk,  
I run up sixteen flights of stairs,  
stand before the serene mountain  
of the Buddha: golden, unmovable,  
trying for just a moment to absorb  
this peace—then just as fast  
dart back down, darkness cloaking  
the streets. The same guy on the bike  
waits for me—my only option.  
He nods as I show him the hotel on the map.

Threading through the flow of traffic,  
my constant mantra: be careful, please  
be careful, please.

Back to the lights and safety of the hotel,  
I gladly pay what he asks though  
it's many times over what he quoted.

I almost kiss him.

## Debra Kang Dean

### MEDICINE BALL

I think that's what it's called,  
that half-deflated leather ball  
he keeps ahead of him with a blow  
delivered dead on with toe-tip.  
A dull thud, like a body struck,  
and it dribbles a few feet. It's not luck  
that steers its course, but the man's  
intent, sure as a train track.  
It's in the odd angle of his left arm,  
the hand stiffly suspended, that you know  
some harm has befallen him—stroke?  
heart attack?—you know he is  
a thing refusing brokenness.  
You read it in the set of his jaw,  
the barrel chest that squares his shoulders  
as he shuffles just inside the paved path.  
You, too, have come to the park  
in the aftermath of your own disaster.  
Thump, and the ball inches to a rest  
just beyond the bench where you imagine  
yourself for the first time taking  
a long drag on a cigarette. *Sublime*.  
It's the only word that describes  
the billowy clouds, their tops backlit  
against a sky the same blue as  
your man's eyes, already deepening  
into a melancholier blue. Thump.  
The man passes before you.  
He does not look up. Periwinkle?  
Cornflower? Orchid, perhaps?  
You don't have a name for it yet.  
So you write this down  
while there's still a little light.

## Edmund August

### HIS EYES

galvanized nails  
driven  
till their  
hammer-shined heads  
filled gaps  
in our conversation  
with oaken silence  
as I  
tried to explain  
why she  
left us.

### HIS EYES

galvanized nails  
driven  
till their  
hammer-shined heads  
filled gaps  
in our conversation  
with oaken silence  
as I  
tried to explain  
why she'd never  
leave us.

## Graham Hillard

### DISCOVERY

You dragged yourself home,  
fur matted,  
limp-legged,  
blood seeping still  
from the mark left  
by a thing not of your breed.

Seeing you, we stared  
as if waiting for what  
couldn't possibly be  
to resolve into the usual,  
to have been just a trick  
of the eyes; we watched dumbly,  
convinced you were  
as good as dead.

Eighteen stitches later,  
half a pint  
of blood newly yours,  
you came home. Your weakness known, they told us,  
you'd be attacked again  
and again if we allowed it,  
so we brought you in,

your quivering maw  
a parody of sleeping,  
your nails on the hardwood  
tapping out your occasional presence,  
reminding us of your need  
for food, your eyes alone bright  
with this new knowledge,  
or what we call knowledge  
because we have no other  
word for it.

**Dan O'Brien**

**GREENWICH / ISLE OF DOGS**

Down beneath river past strangers to rise  
and sit in the maritime pews with all  
midnight mass aglow below and hearing  
nothing of the remonstrating sermon  
but in love with my self and this stray's life

## Thomas Ramey Watson

### TRANSSEXUALISM

In the apartment next door  
the man and woman are playing musical chairs.  
The walls are thin. You can see them.  
The dog and the cat join in.

He's tired of holding the cigar,  
of putting it out in every crevice.  
She's tired of being the closet  
where things go in  
and come out again,  
unchanged.

He manages a chair  
like a womb  
for her to enter.  
Then falls down—he's out—  
his desire for a long time.  
She refuses, stands still.  
Collapses.

Only the dog and cat remain—  
a chair for each at the end.

## Joyce McDonald

### SNAKE BITE

As we cross the bridge  
over the Delaware  
my father stares down  
at the ice-crust-ed banks  
and says he thinks  
he'll have a snake bite  
when he gets home.

A snake bite, he tells me,  
is a drink—one shot  
of Yukon Jack over ice  
with a dash of lime.

At home he sinks  
into his recliner,  
shoves the walker  
to one side with eyes  
as blank as the TV screen.

He is ninety-four this month,  
and because he asked,  
my mother bought the whisky  
then hid it in the pantry  
beneath paper bags.

She says she can't find it,  
and when I do, she claims  
they have no ice. I am there,

she reminds me, to balance  
the checkbook, not tend bar.

I hand her a glass. I say  
*borrow ice from your neighbor.*  
Sometimes a man  
needs to meet the snake  
head on.



## Zachary Martin

### HOLES

Digging holes, I can attest, is easier than mourning dead fathers. Digging requires only a pair of broad shoulders and a knack for redundancy, until the process becomes hard-wired into your muscles. With mourning, the way you set the sharp edge of the spade into the human heart is as important as the rich brown shovelful of clay you come up with. Or perhaps there is only one type of grief, and the difference between my aunts, who pride themselves on lachrymose displays at family funerals, and myself, who did not shed a tear over my father's casket but felt the chill of mortality down to my loins, is merely one of perspective. What else do you call the pile of dirt next to a hole but a cavity in the sky?

I take a moment to survey my work thus far. I have dug precisely eighty-seven holes in my father's backyard, which is now *my* backyard, I suppose. At first I moved around randomly, like a Conestoga man with a divining rod, but when this failed to yield the results I had hoped for, I fell back on my geometric mind and decided to parcel up the land. I have completed three rows of holes so far, running east to west across the property. This orderly march to a result pleases me, like when I used to run through all the combinations on the safe-deposit box my father kept under his bed, first twirling through the ones place, then the tens, then the hundreds, until the box clicked open to reveal a stash of old nudie mags.

In the yard next to mine, my father's neighbor Ernie has taken up the task of digging too. To anyone passing by on the county road, it appears we have been hired by the forestry service to prepare the ground for an Arbor Day memorial tree planting, but, in truth, our goal is much less humanitarian. We are digging to find my inheritance. While my father did entrust his living will to a lawyer, there is every indication that he buried a large deal of his cash in the backyard. This is not the rambling of a grieved son, either. Even the lawyer, a starched-shirt prick with skin as pale as women's undergarments, says so. This is in keeping with my father's style: it is not hard to imagine the delight that it gave him in his final months to know that his only

child would be roasting under the Central Florida sun, trying to find the last cache of money he couldn't blow before his heart gave out.

Next door, Ernie is trying to tell me something.

"What?" I shout. I can't hear him over the Lynyrd Skynyrd he has playing on his tape deck. He turns down "Freebird"—I have heard it now six times, as he flips the cassette first to one side then back to the other, and can honestly say that it holds up to repeated listening—and tries again.

"I said, 'You gotta put your back into it.'" He laughs. Ernie is a large man, built as solidly as the Peterbilt sitting in his front yard. Though everything about him would seem to imply that he is a simple-minded redneck, Big Ern is wily in a way that only Southern men can be, relying on their accents to set the bar low for them and coiling for attack at the most opportune times. Ernie has assured me that if he should find the money first he is keeping it. Pale Prick advised me that this is perfectly within his legal rights, if the money is indeed buried on his property.

To compound the problem, neither Ernie nor I are sure where exactly the property line is. The lot Ernie's house sits on was empty until a year and a half ago and there is no way to know whether my father was aware of the boundaries of his homestead. This is precisely the news that heartens Ernie enough to bend down for each shovelful of dirt, but I know my father well enough to believe he had staked his surroundings down to the last blade of St. Augustine crabgrass. This was a man who, as soon as I could walk, blindfolded me so I would know the way around the house in case of fire or nuclear fallout. Even today, I cannot stay at a hotel without counting the paces from the bed to the door.

"Boy, I sure am getting tired," I shout to Ernie. I am confident that the prize is well within reach, and can allow myself time to taunt.

"That's 'cause of them skinny arms you got." This is true, and I wonder for a moment if my father's purpose in burying my inheritance is not, after all, to finally put some meat on my bones. The possibility cannot be written off. Ernie stops working long enough to flip over his cassette tape, and then the raucous normalcy of the afternoon returns, as comforting as the dull roar of a jet's turbines.

After I dig twenty-six more holes, I re-count the shallow pits in

the yard to make sure Big Ern does not sneak over, while I'm gone, and illegally excavate, and then I lay my shovel down and take a break. I have promised my mother I will drive her to the airport.

"How are you and Cynthia?" my mother asks in the car. I've picked her up from her hotel and must drive her into Orlando to catch her flight. She and my father separated shortly after I left home, and she has never been to his new house. She hardly believes that his death is any reason to change that, says that the only reason she even came back to Florida for his funeral is moral support for me, but I know this is not entirely true. She has come back to see for herself that her husband is really dead, half hoping it is a ploy to win her back. My father has done stranger things.

She is also here to meddle. She knows damn well Cynthia and I will not be getting together.

It was almost a year ago that Cynthia told me she was going to leave. She asked me to join her for lunch and we walked to a bistro around the corner from her office building. I noticed with pleasure the dichotomy of Peachtree Road. On one side of the street rose towering monuments to the commerce of The South, complete with Corinthian columns of pink Georgia marble and large, revolving glass doors. The other side featured a row of squat wooden buildings behind leafy front gardens, some of them private residences, some of them converted to trendy restaurants. Cynthia was distracted and unwilling to talk about anything except the quality of the mahi-mahi, as sure a sign of coming weather as an Alabama thunderhead. I kept quiet.

"How long have we been together?" she asked me, and though I knew it was as unlikely for her to lose a client to another portfolio manager as lose track of the number of notches in our relationship, I answered sincerely.

"Six years this April." I readjusted myself nervously in my chair, banging my knee against the underside of the table.

"And where are we going?" She looked extremely grave and serious, which made me smile. Our table was outside, in the early afternoon sun. I believe the heat had made my tartar sauce go sour. Just a few months before, Cynthia and I had walked by this very restaurant on our way to the Fox Theatre, where we saw Hal Holbrook

perform as Mark Twain in a traveling production. It was quite good. The restaurant had been under different management then, offering a menu of southern cooking and cajun-creole cuisine. In another few months' time, I remember thinking, it would have a new theme and new owners, and there would be another production at the Fox that I could walk up to the box office and buy tickets for. Hal Holbrook would be in Detroit, or Phoenix, or Gary, Indiana, and the Alvin Ailey dance troupe would be onstage at the Fox and I would be eating capers and linguine instead of blackened snapper. "I feel dead," Cynthia said. "And I want something new. Something better. I want to be with someone who doesn't have a concrete heart. Do you understand?"

Yes, of course I understood. I was incapable of giving, but more importantly, incapable of taking without a profound sense of guilt. I am emotionally inadequate. In nearly six years together, was she just realizing this?

"Cynthia is doing very well," I say to my mother. Indeed, she is by and large. I, on the other hand, have been moving from city to city for the last eleven months, something my mother never lets me forget when I call her every week or so. I stopped telling her that I was moving, but she got Caller ID and now just up looks the area codes in a national phonebook at the public library. Retirees will do incredible things to occupy their days.

"You can always come and live with me," my mother says. She lives in Fishersville, Virginia, and two days a week she volunteers at a local museum that honors the first settlers to the Shenandoah Valley region. The portrait of stability.

"No thank you." I have not lived with either of my parents since I moved out a little over a decade ago, and I do not intend to break that streak. I keep my eyes fixed squarely on the turnpike.

"Let me stay here and help you sort everything out with your father's estate."

"That's not necessary, Mother." No doubt she is needed in Fishersville—there are dioramas of the early pioneers that need dusting, or school groups that need to be told to keep their oily hands off the glass displays of arrowheads from long extinct Indian tribes. I do not have it in me to deny my mother these small pleasures, and insist that she catch her flight.

Heading back from Orlando, I make a side trip to the city planner's office. I intend to settle the boundary between Ernie and me once and for all. The office is situated along St. Cloud's main road, between Carolina and Delaware Avenue, in a strip mall, right next to a Dollar General. Walking into the air-conditioned office, I see immediately it is the kind of place I want to work at for the rest of my life, taking lunch breaks at the local Pizza Hut and coming home to my pudgy wife, her fat fingers interlacing with mine as we lean together to kiss. The thin wood veneers are beginning to peel up from the particle board countertops, and the sun comes in, dustily, between the white vertical blinds. The only other person in the office besides myself sits comfortably, her feet up on one of the heavy oak desks.

"Can I help you?" She does not stir.

"Yes. My father recently passed"—she is taking her feet down from the desk now—"and I was hoping to get a copy of the surveyor's sheets. So I know the boundaries of the property."

"Fifty dollars," she says.

I pull out my wallet and count the contents.

"I have forty-two dollars," I say. I remember my change from the turnpike. "And fifty cents."

She saunters over, stares at my money, and leans both her elbows on the counter. The wood veneer and particle board rejoin each other. I hold the bills out for her approval, eagerly, like I am back in the Boy Scouts, offering up my first aid kit for my father's inspection. There was something comforting in knowing that it could not possibly meet with his exacting specifications; he would always find something missing: Tiger Balm, for chaffing; sulphur, for gaping wounds; and rubbers, "just in case." I was the only twelve-year-old to hike a section of the Appalachian Trail with syrettes of morphine.

"I'll take it," she says, and snatches up the money. As she counts the money for herself—a ten, five fives and seven ones—testing the texture of each bill, I notice the henna tattoo that wraps around her wrist and crawls up the back of her hand and into the webbing between her fingers. She walks to the back of the office, and I watch her calf-length skirt shimmy back and forth around her bottom. She opens a door and then turns to me.

"Where'd you say your father's place was?"

“I didn’t. But it’s on West Acres. Between California and Tennessee.”

She nods and disappears, closing the door behind her. Suddenly my pudgy wife will no longer do. Instead I want to be naked with this girl, circling her areolas with semi-permanent swirls and her belly button with concentric teardrops, but I find it best to keep these thoughts to myself, to filter out all questionable material until I am left with only the detritus of the hackneyed formula, sure to fail.

“What are you doing later?” I ask when the girl comes from the back. I cannot even deliver the formula convincingly.

“Going home.” She has recognized the hack, parried appropriately. She lays a sheaf of papers out on the counter top, rifles through them until she comes to my father’s street. “Here,” she says, and puts a hennaed finger on the spot where, were he a paper man shoveling paper dirt in search of paper money (the irony does not escape me), Ernie would be standing.

“Can I make a copy of these. . . . ?”

“. . . Linda.”

“Can I make a copy of these, *Linda*?” Point for me; I’m back in the running. I have used common business courtesy to get a foot in the door. There is hope for the formula after all, if properly applied.

“We’re not supposed to,” she says. She is on her heels, wanting to be convinced to break free of the tedium, the malaise.

“Well, what was my forty-two dollars for, then?”

“And fifty cents?” She lacks the desire to win. I’m sure of it.

“And fifty cents.”

“Access. Just for looking,” she says.

“Well, then it was worth every penny.” I am confident, in position for the final flanking maneuver. “Are you sure I can’t make a copy?”

She has to think about it. “Yes, I’m sure.” Good. She has established a boundary. Without borders, victories are meaningless. Father used to regale me with bedtime stories of Hannibal coming over the Alps, leading a platoon of pachyderms, torching Rome and watching Mediterranean women run screaming in the streets, naked to the waist. The joy in watching a city burn, I believe the lesson was, is knowing you will be moving on in the morning.

“Do you have a sheet of scrap paper, then?” I ask. This, she can

manage. Outside it is getting late, surely quitting time in sleepy St. Cloud. I copy down the measurements from the house to the edge of the property. "I'm not keeping you, am I?"

"Oh, no." Can I take this as a sign that she has no plans after work? In a quiet town like this, I take the risk.

"Some friends and I are grilling out," I say. This is almost a lie. Ernie is a friend, at least insofar as it is because of him that I am in this office talking to Linda, and I am afraid to use my father's old gas range, and have been unwilling to clean the grease traps, so I have eaten out or grilled on the patio every night since I got into town. "You should come by."

"Maybe. I may have plans with someone."

Look at the linguistic barricades she throws up. May have. Someone. Maybe. She is falling fast. I see now it is time for the coup de grace.

"I like your tattoo."

"Oh. Thanks. I have a bunch of real tats, too," she says, spinning around and turning out the waistline of her skirt to reveal a design that fills the valley at the base of her spine formed by the sway of her back. Concentric teardrops and semi-permanent swirls indeed. Linda has just shared with me a very intimate swathe of her flesh, and we have bonded because I have ogled it. What a peculiar and fail-proof way to become close in the new millennium. Were I to compliment her on the gentle rise of her chest, or the wonderful angles between her waist and hips, Linda would have me Out-the-door-We're-closed-Thank-you-very-much, but this indelible design across the upper range of her buttocks makes her suddenly appreciate my aesthetic sensibilities.

"Let me give you my address," I say.

"That's okay," Linda says. "You're on West Acres, between California and Tennessee, right?"

"Right," I say. "I'll be putting the steaks on at six."

She eyes me carefully. She wants to let me know that she has my number, mister.

"Dead father, huh?"

"As dirt," I say, and leave, unsure of whether my groin is aching because of Linda or the callous mention of my father.

I decide to call Cynthia. When we were still together, we would often ignore each other's calls, pretending, when we got home, that the other must be lying and in fact had not called at all. I used to do this because I had grown tired of talking to her at all hours of the day; I believe she did it because she was too busy and her company frowned on personal calls. Now that we are separated, we pick up without fail, usually in the first two rings. It is a peculiar circumstance that the end of a relationship should bring two people closer, though only in the most superficial ways.

"Can I please speak to my daughter?"

"You don't have a daughter," Cynthia says. This is true. I do not have any children at all—mine are genes one avoids passing on, if possible—but Cynthia and I used to share possession of a female Jack Russell Terrier, and it often comforts me to hear her shrill bark, which used to be the first thing I heard each morning, the noise that told me I had come through the night and rejoined the world of beating hearts.

"Is she there?"

"Yes. But she's a good dog now. She doesn't bark in the house." This, it seems to me, is a shame, for her annoying habit of yelping when she didn't get what she wanted was Cammy's most endearing trait. "Why are you calling?"

"My father is dead," I say.

"Michael, I'm sorry." There is earnestness in her voice. "When is the funeral?"

"The day before yesterday."

"Oh." She seems hurt.

"Are you hurt?"

"No, I understand." She was never especially fond of my parents, especially my father, who was a cipher to her. He used to drink too much wine at dinner and get to shouting racial slurs and then berate her for being too uptight to slip naked into the hot tub with him. I cannot imagine that she would have wanted to come down to St. Cloud to see him into the earth. I have decided that I am going to be more decisive. This particular phone call is an exception to the new, better me, a lapse I make like clockwork.

"That's all I have to say."

"Are you seeing someone?" she asks. If she had not asked it of



me, I would have asked it of her. It is a game we play, and she has lost this round. I usually play coy, and answer with the assumption she means, Am I still going to see a therapist on a regular basis, which I never am. But this afternoon I *decide*—being pro-active makes the world sparkle with the magic of possibility—to tell the truth, more or less.

“I’m having the mayor’s daughter over for barbecue.” I allow myself this one small exaggeration, though St. Cloud is small and the prospect that Linda’s family has political ties is not altogether remote. I have always wanted to be involved with the daughter of a seedy politician. It is an inexplicable fantasy, the way some men seek out girls with fat ankles.

“You’re a liar,” Cynthia says.

“Yes,” I respond. She thinks I am still trying to get back at her for the time she told me about being involved with a married man from work. “Another big swingin’ dick,” I called him, and though I had never met the man as near as I can recall, I knew at once that he had a thick mane of back hair and a recurring case of athlete’s foot. “He makes me feel beautiful,” she told me. But she overestimated the effect that this revelation had on me. As soon as I had gotten out of my mind the image of him roaring over her in climax, the muscles of his well-furred buttocks tensed tight as a snare drum, I was quite restored to equilibrium. I have now all but forgotten the whole incident.

“I thought so,” she says.

“Is that all?”

“You called me.”

“And you’re going to insist that I can’t speak to my own daughter?”

“God help you,” she says, and hangs up.

Linda shows up right at six. She is as straight and true as the rows of holes in my backyard. “Here,” she says, handing me a wad of crumpled money.

“What’s this?”

“Your forty-two fifty. It doesn’t cost anything to look at surveyor’s sheets. They’re public information, an arm of the tax assessment department. I didn’t want to start off on the wrong foot.”

“And the copies?”

“Oh, that’s for real,” she says. “We don’t make copies for private citizens.” She pauses to take in her surroundings and then asks, “So where is everyone else?”

Ah, yes, my lie. It is difficult to keep them straight.

“I forgot that I had scheduled my gathering for the same evening as the St. Cloud Serpentarium’s annual Python Ball,” I say. “They’re selecting the Cobra Queen tonight. I got a great many last minute cancellations.”

Linda does not seem to mind.

I offer her a glass of red wine and allow her to wander around my father’s house while I finish marinating the steaks. I will be intrigued to find out what she learns about me from poking through my dead father’s belongings. No doubt there will be certain assumptions, and most of them are probably true, as my father and I share a lot in common. We are both autodidacts, as neither of us had very promising college careers, but while my interests always fell toward British poetry and Graham Greene first editions, my father hoarded early nineteenth-century tracts on onanism and magazines from the sexual revolution of the 1960s.

When dinner is served, Linda has found nothing untoward in my father’s house, nothing that indicates my unworthiness, or at least nothing she desires to share over sirloin and baked potatoes. It is only just before the sun begins to set that she asks me about the patterns in the pockmarked lawn. I explain to Linda why I am systematically aerating the entire backyard, being sure to describe neighbor Ernie in detail, trying to make myself look psychologically balanced by comparison.

“That’s exciting,” she says. “Can we dig after dinner?”

Since I have not planned an activity for after the meal, digging holes to close out a first date seems as reasonable as anything else. I scrounge through the garage and find an army-issue folding shovel, while Linda scrapes the plates into the garbage can in the kitchen. We are already beginning to multitask. This is promising.

I redirect a patio light to shine out across the yard, just in time for late dusk. Linda insists on using the army shovel. We are daring each other to work harder—a game—and with each shovelful of dirt,

I feel less numb. No longer does each pitch of earth remind me of the first I threw on to my father's casket at the gravesite. The wonderful monotony of digging slows down my higher brain, and I think for a moment that this must be the sheer joy Ernie feels in manual labor, then even that self-consciousness erodes. Linda has begun to gently perspire in the humid Florida evening, and I feel nothing but pure animal desire for her.

That is something I want, I tell myself, and have never been surer of anything in my life.

"You're sure it's out here somewhere?" Linda asks, after digging a few holes.

"I've never been surer of anything in my life." This is a lie, but an encouraging one. We continue digging together, side-by-side, filling in each other's holes with dirt for a laugh. She tells me about her childhood in Pahokee, along the southern rim of Lake Okeechobee; I tell her about the kind of man who would bury money in his own backyard, the kind who would, like me, play in the dirt if it meant not having to come face to face with grief. After we have dug a few more rows, Ernie's porch light flashes on and he steps out to observe us. He opens the screen door again, disappears inside, and returns with his own shovel. He believes we are trying to put one over on him, working here in the moonlight. For a time, we are a machine, the three of us, rending the earth asunder. We are mammalian weevils, burrowing far and wide.

"What's my take?" Linda asks.

"All of it," I say, and I mean it.

"Why can't you have gotten an earth tiller?"

"Tear up the canister when we find it," I say. "Besides, it's not in the spirit my father intended, I don't think." I am learning that the process is half the fun.

We continue to turn over soil, and this work, remarkably, continues to be agreeable to Linda. She is lost in the hunt. My back begins to ache, but Linda shows no signs of slowing, so I march forward. The bright light from the patio throws her sinews into stark contrast, highlights her pulp-comic curves. Ernie is huffing along, well shy of where I now know the property line lies. And then the phone rings. I am caught up in the hard-wired movement of digging, but welcome

the chance to rest my biceps.

It takes four rings to retrieve the cordless. It is Cynthia. He's lost a step, she's thinking.

Cynthia wants to talk sweetness. She has just picked Cammy up from Doggy Day Care and is sorry for earlier.

"Your father just died," she says. "I should have been more understanding."

"That's okay." The hurry in my voice is audible.

"Is someone there?"

"No."

"Can you talk?"

"Yes." My inability to say what I want is insurmountable.

"I want to talk about us," Cynthia says when, from the backyard, Linda shouts, "I've found it." I run out on to the back patio and see Linda down on her knees paddling the dirt away with her hands.

"Hold on," I say into the phone and join Linda. Ernie is standing above us, miffed but curious. I set the cordless down and pull from the ground a rusty can and set it on a pile of dirt. It is a can of Uncle Joe's Mint Balls, and the joyful face of a British dandy stares back at me, tipping his top hat—in deference to the bereaved, I imagine. It is then I remember that the very self-same can sat on my father's bookshelf throughout childhood—the same red and blue enamel paint, the same foppish grin, the same malted mints that my father delighted in but which could only be bought on infrequent trips abroad. I was only allowed a ball of the candy under extraordinary circumstances, and though it was really nothing more than a well-made sweet, the sense of ceremony that came with each delicious unwrapping of the wax paper imbued the can of mints with a secretiveness, an unimpeachability, that captured the very essence of how I viewed my father. I allow the events of the intervening twenty years to melt away, like so much sugar on my tongue, and nothing of consequence—the deaths and divorces, the countless emotional tortures, the longing and despair—could have occurred, because a can of Uncle Joe's Mint Balls is in my hands again. Only the hollow echo of Cammy's bark, coming from the receiver, jolts me back to the present, and the thin string of my existence, tangled momentarily by elusive memories, is stretched taut once more. I breathe a heavy sigh.

“Open it,” Linda says.

“Go on,” Ernie says.

I weigh the can in my hand. It is too light to contain much, if any, money. I set it between my knees and begin to pry off the lid. I smell the faint odor of evaporated peppermint oil and begin to cry, trying to hold the memory of my father bringing down the can on a special occasion—a birthday or perfect report card, perhaps. But it’s no use. The can of candy becomes in my hands just another can, and my grief an indistinct grief that mingles with the infinite agonies of the world. I pull off the lid—the can has become completely unremarkable now, utterly devoid of possibility—and lean over so no one else can see inside. I try to clear my eyes of tears, enough so I can make out the contents, and listen to the breathless anticipation of the people around me, the high-pitched whine of a dog mingled with static. I am sobbing now, but no one moves or speaks; we are, each of us, alone with memories. The crickets are beginning to chirp and soon it will be midnight, and the soft summer Florida rains will come to begin washing the mountains of dirt back down into the rifts and valleys, making everything smooth once more.

“What is it?” Cynthia asks from a thousand miles away. “What is it? Tell me.”

## Philip Hopkins

### THE VESSEL

1.

My father went to Cologne, Germany, five years before the Wall fell to attend the Singularity Conference. An unpopular gathering even then, it was a meeting of physicists from all over the globe who were focused on dense matter. Paul trained himself on the first moment of time, using theoretical tools that most considered irrelevant.

A twenty-one-year-old prodigy, he met my mother in the cafeteria, where Audrey had gathered with her colleagues from Columbia University. She told me once, when he was sick and we were visiting him, that he looked ridiculous when she first saw him. A rumpled jacket, jeans and a Grateful Dead T-shirt, a complete California casualty. She was a poor grad student but her father, a corporate lawyer, kept her in tidy suits and pencil skirts. Though she didn't go for Chanel until later, Audrey admitted she copied Hepburn closely.

"And that's what hooked him. I was a sophisticate, unlike anyone he'd met at Berkeley. Even in '84, people still thought of that school and town as a bastion of liberal rebellion. An East Bay kid, he had always secretly wanted to fuck some Harvard chick from a good family. The uptight Eastern prep school thing turned him on. That, and the fact that of the three women there, I was the only one who washed her hair."

My mother's mixture of modesty and self-congratulation extended to her work. "I was a brilliant teacher, which I had just begun to realize in Cologne, but I hated learning the latest formulas every ten minutes to keep up. It wasn't that I couldn't do the math. I just didn't want to."

According to her, he filled his tray with food that day, then sat down next to her and asked her a technical question about what she'd thought of his lecture on early time. She laughed at him.

"That's your opening line?" she said. She noted that his eyes were gold, a shade she had never seen anywhere that she could remember.

"How's this: Your lips were drawn by an over-enthusiastic child."

“Not good.”

“What do you call a woman at a physics conference? The caterer.”

“Fuck you.”

“I wish you would.” Everyone at the table turned away from him.

Audrey Tisdale knew of Paul Harberg by professional reputation but had skipped his lecture, and told him so. The other women at the table said they had, too. He became angry and started ranting about his ideas and how the only way to explain gravity and light was to look at them contemporaneously, before they split into separate realms.

“You’re boring me.”

“You could use a good boring,” he said.

“Slapping you would be flattery. I’ll just go.” She stood up to leave, and he said he’d see her at that afternoon’s talk by a rival of his. “Yes, I’ll definitely be at that.”

Fernando Cortazar was a shaggy-haired, prematurely grey thirty-year-old from Argentina. “He looked like a dandelion, and he fucked like one,” Mom told me later. “The only reason I screwed your father was to get that experience off my skin. He, at least, was a live one.”

I was conceived that night, she told me, their only son and heir. They never considered getting married, but he moved with her to the East Coast and they tried to raise me together for a few years before they separated. The next day at the conference he had the breakthrough that would obsess him for years, and make his reputation.

2.

I stayed with him in Berkeley for a month each summer, and on my tenth trip to his ludicrously messy apartment I was fifteen. When he came back to the place one night after carousing, his nose was an inch to the right of where it originally had been. Blood had blackened his chin and he was laughing.

“You should see Walter,” he howled, “he’s crawling around the bar looking for his teeth.” His brother was a mechanic and computer repairman. In his countless drunks, Dad often fought whoever was nearby. And that night, to both their misfortune, Paul’s estranged brother had given him a chance to remediate some of the previous

damage his behavior had caused. According to Dad, Walter overreacted to everything.

“Sure I wrecked his car, but he’s a mechanic, for God’s sake.” Now he’d gotten in another fistfight with his only living family besides me. I asked why. “After five shots, he told me he’d fucked your mother. He’s lucky he’s alive.”

Walter slept with her the first time he visited New York after Mom and Dad separated, when I was six. After the split, Dad had moved back to Berkeley and claimed to be over her, even giving Walter her number to prove it. “She was supposed to tell him where to eat. I didn’t say he could eat her,” he told me the night of the fight.

“Dad, that was almost nine years ago.”

“Stale lies are the worst. Give me fresh truth any day.”

He refused my insistence that he go to the hospital, and crashed face-up on his bed. The next day, Mom admitted to me over the phone that she’d bedded Walter, mainly out of vengeance. “The heart hates harder than it loves. Plus, Walter’s a nice guy.”

My refuge from chaos was musical order. I lived through the cello. Vladimir Ostrovsky, the mentor of several of the country’s prodigies, made time for me when I came to the Bay Area that year. The day after Dad’s fight with his brother, my father went to get his nose reset, and I went to the master’s apartment north of the campus.

“You use too much vibrato,” he said. “You’re too dramatic. You play like a heartbroken little girl.” When I turned purple with shame, he apologized to me. “I’m an old man,” he said. “The very young play out of a need to satisfy their own desires. What about the composer? What about his desires?”

When I told Dad that story he loved it. “People always pursue theories that they think are beautiful because it gets them off. What about the composer? What did he want?”

I went back to New York after that month looking for a teacher like Ostrovsky. Walter called my mother and told her he had gotten false teeth, and she laughed for hours. I was shocked when Walter moved to New York a few months later. He worked in a Brooklyn auto shop, repairing taxis, and came to hear every recital I played. Mom insisted they weren’t screwing, and I believed her. Mom gave up teaching science at a prep school when her father died, and she



inherited seven million dollars. “You don’t have to be a great cellist anymore,” she told me. “You have the money to be mediocre.” I strove harder, but quickly realized that I was not getting into Juilliard. I made too many mistakes. I had the feeling, but not the technique.

“You play for yourself,” Walter told me. “Other people don’t matter.” He dressed sloppy, but kept physically trim, and treated me with dignity. As my all-but-stepfather, he introduced me to sports and made me a baseball fan. We went to Mets games and screamed our voices raw every time. He had some money troubles, and wasn’t kind on the subject of Paul, but was generally the male I needed at that time.

By then Dad’s theories had fallen so completely out of favor that he ended up teaching at a small college in Connecticut. He loathed conveying the ideas of other people, whose notions he considered out of date, or flat wrong. But he claimed his workload wasn’t so great that it stopped his progress. “I’m about two months away from understanding it all,” he would say regularly. One time I went to New London to stay with him for three days and began to understand the full scope of his deterioration.

He was no longer drinking much, but he was smoking pot all day every day. He was back to the Grateful Dead T-shirts and seemed to be trying to recreate himself ten years younger. Meanwhile, he had retained his beer belly and grown a scraggly beard. He took me out hunting women to a bar called Manny’s, by his apartment. “Fucking women is like doing physics,” he would say. “The answers you find just lead to tougher questions.”

One night we met a lawyer who was thirty and had just gotten divorced. She had a perfect ass, and spoke to me as though I were a novelty.

“Cellist, huh? I like musicians. Young ones especially.” I was a twenty-five-year-old virgin. I went to her place with her, and she made me go down on her for hours. The sex was brief as I was overly excited. The whole thing left me feeling idiotic. When I returned to my dad’s apartment in the morning with the key he’d given me, I found him in his underwear cutting himself on the thighs with a razor blade. Blood striped his legs.

“To understand what’s going on, we have to suffer like God suffered when creating.” I didn’t try to stop him, and took the train home

that night beginning to believe I'd never see him again.

On my next visit, he was full of chemicals. He had started taking bipolar meds which seemed to make him worse. He had gotten a tattoo of a big black dot on his neck that he called the singularity. As if that wasn't ridiculous enough, he was sleeping with a student named Cherish. She was a scared-looking undergraduate whose whole aspect seemed the opposite of my mother's. Dirty hair, not in any way stylish, no real intellectual interests. As my father went out to pick up a pizza, she and I talked.

"Your dad's brilliant."

"His mind is unknown territory to me."

"Many of the biggest scientific advances have come from people outside the mainstream. At least that's what he says."

"What's your major?"

"English. I took physics because my father made me. He's a chemist and says that I needed some real science. Physics seemed cooler than chemicals."

When Paul got back he was flying. He had a sack of probably three dozen watches that he'd bought from a street vendor. "This is a gold mine!" he declared. I groaned, and Cherish got up and left. My father accused me of sleeping with her. He took a swing at me. I punched him in the gut. He doubled over and coughed up blood. I realized that whatever he was smoking now had ruined his throat. I nearly broke the door down in my haste to leave, and walked to the train.

Later that year, on my birthday, he came to New York. He was sober and looked healthy. He was dressed like a professor in a movie, with new glasses. He had lunch with Mom and me and was cordial. On a ramble over the Brooklyn Bridge he discussed his latest thinking.

"I've found the math that backs up my ideas on gravity," he said. "Even now, no one understands it on a quantum level. But I think I can do it. Unify the universe. It's beautiful and simple."

"What makes you think it's right?"

"Well, Mingus, the jazz bassman, said complexity is easy, but simplicity is difficult."

"Maybe creating the universe was easy."

“Like childbirth? That’s our analogy for it. The Creator built pain into everything.” He proceeded to talk about Jewish and Arab mystics, Gnostics and poets. His favorite notion was that the universe was a fractured vessel of which we were pieces trying to reunite the contents. He said that the vessel was matter and the contents light. I asked him how the whole process was intended to work. How did the vessel and its contents come together again?

“Through other people.” I knew that he planned to see Walter. We walked over the bridge, and he talked about how much he liked its elegance.

3.

By this time I knew Walter’s girlfriend Jessica fairly well. She was constantly trying to set me up with her nieces, cousins, friends, and new acquaintances. She even set me up with a guy once because I’d struck out with or rejected so many women. When she called me, the panic in her voice had made her shrill and hard to listen to.

“Where’s your father?”

“Did he come to see Walter?”

“Yes, where did he go?”

“I don’t know. What happened?”

“They fought. Walter’s in critical, and Paul’s gone.” I ran to the subway and took a 6 train down to the Brooklyn Bridge stop; it was faster than a cab. As I walked over the span, I looked for Paul anywhere along the bottom rungs of the structure, realizing gradually that this was not the bridge to jump from because the walkway was elevated and flanked by the road on either side. Stopping, I looked upriver and noticed a group of police cars gathered on the Manhattan Bridge, lights flashing. A German guy with a telephoto lens was fixated on the scene and pointing. I asked him in English what he was seeing.

“A man on the bridge. He’s going to fall.” I sprinted until I had to slow to a jog. By the time I got there, paramedics had arrived.

“Get away,” said a cop. “I’m his son,” I told him, and he let me through. After talking to the negotiator briefly, I shouted at my father. He was standing on the bottom rail and dangling one leg out off the bridge.

“What happened?” I screamed, the wind taking my voice. “What

about unifying everything?”

“It’s better than I thought. We’re all components of the perfect plan.” His face was bloody, and swelling yellow-purple flesh had nearly closed one eye. But he was smiling.

“That’s stupid. You hate stupid.”

“I love it all,” he said. He looked up at me again, and then he let go.

4.

Walter recovered and, for reasons I didn’t understand, attended the funeral. Dad had drawn up an elaborate will and left to me his final paper, which he mandated that I sell online to the highest bidder. I did submit it to several journals, and one accepted it.

Within a year, the physics world was following Paul’s path to the center of the mysteries of gravity and light. I was contacted by several newspapers to write remembrances of my father, but I knew what they wanted and was not interested in providing it.

The next year at a music festival in Cologne, I met an older woman, an attendee at a reception, who looked at my name tag several times while talking to me about the piece we’d performed. Then she asked if I was related to Paul Harberg. I asked how she knew, and she said I had the same eyes. Greta Handke was a physicist who had met my father at that Singularity conference twenty-five years before. She told me she’d heard about my father’s death and posthumous rise to prominence. Her smile looked ominous at first, and then a crinkle of lines around her eyes accompanied it and I relaxed as she spoke.

“I scoffed at his ideas. At dinner on the first night he talked a lot about how idiotic my theories were, without knowing who I was.” I laughed at this. Greta then sat me down at a table, ignoring her husband for the moment, and the world evaporated around us.

“He said something at that dinner: He’d been reading a religious book. It said all great good carries great evil. He couldn’t figure out if our contents were evil and the container good, or the reverse.”

“What did you think of that?”

“I think our souls are ugly. That’s why we have faces and bodies. To hide what’s inside.” I contemplated that for a moment. Her husband tugged at her sleeve, but she held up one finger. “We die because

we can't contain our evil." She stood up, and smiled again. "Sorry to upset you, if I did. I'm German. We think about these things." I wanted to object to her ideas, but Greta was gone.

Back home, I could not stop thinking about Greta. Her sagging cheeks and mournful azure eyes implied a life of disappointment. But there was no sign of marital discord in her body language with her husband. Perhaps it was professional disappointment, or something else. The next day, on the first anniversary of Dad's death, I walked out on the Brooklyn Bridge, avoiding looking at the Manhattan.

As I reached the middle, I got an email alert that someone had posted an article with my father's name on it somewhere on the web. I pulled it up. The article said that he had been awarded the first posthumous Prange Prize in physics. The award money would be distributed to an institute dedicated to studying bipolar disorder. Only then did my grief consume the landscape around me. Everything around me burned; my feet and hair were burning too. I thought I felt the bridge vibrating in the wind, a string subject to excessive vibrato. Later that day Walter called me. He had just proposed to Jessica, and was inviting me and my mother to their engagement party. I declined, and spent the night looking at my father's manuscripts. The first title he had chosen for his final paper was "Vessels of God."

## Athanasius Anagnostou

### THE TULIP BED

Late this October, I bought a large number of tulip bulbs aiming for a glorious crop in early spring. I got Red Emperor, Queen of the Night, Sweet Desire, Ice Cream, Angelique, Candy Kisses, and Elegant Lady. I worked the soil carefully with a small hoe, enriched it with bone meal and homemade prime compost, placed each bulb gently and lovingly at its proper depth with the root end down, packed the soft brown earth nicely all around, and gently raked the bed for an even leaf-free surface. With the softening of the frozen ground in early spring, there would be a profusion of large bold or seductive clusters, harmonious in design and sublime in the contrast of colors and variety of forms.

The following morning, sunny but chilly, I went out in the garden for some autumnal leaf raking. Passing by the tulip bed, I stopped dead in my tracks. Something was not right. No, not just “not right,” but downright strange, shocking, incomprehensible! My smoothly raked tulip bed was now full of uneven earth mounds and rugged holes. Exhumed, obscenely naked tulip bulbs lay scattered around, on their faces, on their backs, on their sides. It was a sickening, disgusting, blood curdling, stomach-churning sight!

Who or what monster could have done it? For what sick reason? My first thoughts flew to my sullen neighbor across the street. I had no doubt he has always been jealous of my garden. How could he not? His was covered by a scruffy lawn, full of large yellow, brown, or bald patches, barricaded with a tall white plastic picket fence. Never saw him tending with loving care to any part of his garden. Every couple of weeks only, menacing crews of uncommunicative aliens pushed big black dirty lawn mowers and leaf blowers that spewed smoke and asphyxiating gasoline fumes into the crisp air. They ripped up his sad lawn while tormenting our neighborhood with their shrieking decibels. Never saw this passionless neighbor bring out a lounge chair and relax in the warmth of the sunrays, or in the invigorating coolness of a tree shade, to read a book or newspaper or sip a refreshing mint-

flavored drink. Most likely that was because he could not stand glancing furtively across the road at my small piece of Eden. How could he not be jealous of my moss-covered dry stone wall, the varied annuals, the proud perennials blooming in stately succession, the fragrant herbarium that generously stocked my kitchen, the dwarf fruiting trees with their crops, the tidy vegetable garden with the heirloom tomatoes, the gently undulating lush spotless lawn where dandelions and other weeds felt so much out of place they died from shame. No gasoline fumes ever poisoned its air. The grass blades had only a gentle nipping from the push reel mower I inherited from my father (and he from his father). I sharpened it personally every two weeks. Carefree songbirds chose it as safe and happy home for their nests, and butterflies fluttered tremulously, alighting on flowering shrubs like brilliant ornaments on a Christmas tree. This blithe place of inviolable peace, of exquisite floral beauty and true restful felicity, has been my own sacred domain, my painstaking proud creation, and I have been the happiest of men.

There is no doubt: who is not a friend of flowers cannot be trusted. But perhaps this dour and soulless neighbor, who cared so little for gardens, wouldn't think of wasting time to desecrate my little urban oasis.

It could, of course, be the juvenile delinquent from the house to the right. I had taken him—and his indulgent parents—to task several times this past summer for turning our street to a cacophonous playground with his rowdy friends, all with torn denim trousers, frayed baseball caps, and “Jesus hates the Yankees” and “Shit Happens” stamped on their dirty T-shirts. A neighborhood tree-lined street should be for slowly driving through or walking, not for playing basketball, soccer or Frisbee. And it is not only that they take over the street for the length of a whole block. Their balls often fall in the garden, crashing delicate flowers and slender shoots. When these obstreperous brats come to recover their stray missiles from my little Arcadia, do they mind where they step? No sir, the shortest way is always the only way for them. They hardly ever ring the street bell for permission to enter through the old hand-forged iron gate. They climb over the ancient stone wall, scraping off its soft emerald moss coat. They never tread carefully on the red brick-layered trails but

trudge through the pastoral symphony of the flowerbeds, compacting the soft unsuspecting earth, squashing under their dirty sneakers the small plants bursting hopefully from the ground. And when they see me shouting or gesturing at them to get the hell out of my agrarian retreat, they airily mumble “sorry” and off they run for more noisy mischief. It is true, however, that I have not seen them around these last few weeks. School has started and they seem to have transferred their raucous rascality to its graffiti-covered corridors.

Perhaps it was the big, fat, ugly, rust-colored cat whose main residence I have never been able to ascertain. I shiver remembering my troubles with him when I planted *Nepeta* (what most people know as catnip) for a border plant on one of the flowerbeds. That lumbering brute strolled nonchalantly and rolled its mountainous carcass all over the dainty stems, slovenly chewing the tender leaves, slobbering and licking his thuggish smug face with a beefy tongue. When I ran out to remonstrate for his vandalism, I remember with horror how he hissed and growled and, curving a powerful back with bristling hair, readied to jump and scratch my astonished face. This was no common house cat. This was the devil’s cousin from the outer ring of the seventh circle of Dante’s *Inferno*, a grinning sadistic fiend who had smashed his way out of a Hieronymus Bosch painting.

Perhaps it was the two stupid and irascible Pekinese from the house on the left. They seemed to find it convenient—and I imagine funny—to defecate on my patterned brick-paved sidewalk. Their dog walker, a blond, tall, gum-chewing bimbo with high-heel boots and tight pants, never seemed to pay attention to what they did or where they did it. I never saw her carry a pooper-scooper or doggy bag, or clean after their smelly itchy bitsy excrement. Always busy on her pink cell phone, yapping as fast and as irritably as her dogs. First time I complained, she gave me a perfunctory tired look, glanced pityingly at my soiled garden clothes, and continued yammering on her phone. The second time, she did not even look at me but kept up her heated tele-argument with somebody called Armando. However, I never heard of dogs lusting for tulip or other bulbs (although I did read that in Italy sniffing dogs, not pigs, were used for truffle hunting). Also, these ridiculous splenetic Lilliputian creatures were dressed to the nines with their little tartan jackets. I doubt their owner, or even the



floozy yakking dog-walker, would let them run loose and get their manicured nails and perfectly coiffed hair dirty from earth digging.

And, of course, there were the many wild denizens of our wooded suburb: insolent squirrels, scampering chipmunks and sneaky field mice, squawking blue jays and strutting cardinals. They were everywhere!!!! I heard also from neighbors horror stories of moles, skunks, opossums and raccoons, foxes, and even coyotes! My God, my precious tulip bulbs were surrounded by invisible legions of depraved, demented and malevolent haters of all virtuous beauty!

I replanted carefully the desolate-looking bulbs, begging their forgiveness for what they had gone through, this brutal interruption of what should have been a quiet winter slumber. I leveled again the ground over them with layers of loose potting soil. Should now a quadruped or biped defiler walk over the tulip bed, the footprints would definitely show.

I did not rake any leaves that day. Too upset to keep my mind from what had happened, I potted listlessly around the house. Every little while I would go out or look through the bay window to make sure the tulip bed was unperturbed. Night came. Armed with a powerful flashlight I went out every hour to check on the bed. Nothing was moving. A little past midnight, I slept an uneasy sleep. In early morning, I ran out. Horror of horrors!!! Tulip bulbs lay again scattered around, even in greater numbers than the time before. No footprints or animal tracks marked the soft, torn-apart earth. The rest of the garden, the street, all seemed suspiciously quiet and peaceful. My anger, my shock, my disgust, were immeasurable!!! This was a horrible nightmare! Was this some kind of inane joke? Or was it well planned revenge? A jealous neighbor? A spiteful postman shamed for delivering my mail last thing in the day? The flippant newspaper boy scolded for throwing the newspaper with total disregard where it landed? The policemen's or firemen's beneficent society whose frequent and annoying requests for donations I turned down? The sloppy town inspector I reported for trampling my bushes to get to the water meter? Our genteel and storied town seems to have been flooded with so many unsuitable characters!

I needed to think some more about it, I had to find the reason for such unfathomable, such abominable actions, understand what devi-

ous methods were used. But first, I had to take care of the immolated flowerbed. So many of the tulip bulbs had been unearthed, there was no way to know whether my careful planting design was still intact. I would have to do it all over. I dug up the entire bed and collected all the remaining bulbs. There was no way to tell which was which. I gave them a solemn burial in a common grave on the garden's edge. This inglorious end surely was not what they must have envisioned. But it was not my fault. I always have the very best intentions. I went and bought a whole new bagful of choice tulip bulbs and planted them with extra care. Come early spring, my winter-weary eyes would feast on the peerless color schemes of Moulin Rouge, Life's a Cabernet, Hot Pants, Marilyn, Ballerina, Light and Dreamy, All that Jazz, and Black Hero. When I finished, I sprinkled an abundance of red pepper flakes on the covering soil. An oil emulsion of those had kept squirrels away from the bird feeders last year. Perhaps it would keep these new vandals away too. Just for good measure, I also sprinkled a lot of extra hot curry powder of which I seemed to have too much in the pantry.

I spent the rest of the day by the window, hiding behind the heavy curtains, ready to rush outside the moment I saw any sacrilegious gravediggers. I had no time for a proper lunch or dinner but snacked on apples and some crackers and cheese as not to lose sight of the garden. Evening came. I could imagine the villains lurking behind the bushes or the stone wall. I ran out frequently with my flashlight and a heavy iron rod ready to smash the heads of malefactors, but everything seemed eerily quiet and deceitfully peaceful. I think a monstrous black SUV passed by slowly more than once but it did not stop nor was I able to see the face of its driver behind the dark tinted windows. Shadowy people walked by, slowly at times. A young couple stopped by the wall whispering. They seemed surprised to see me appear suddenly at the gate with my flashlight and the iron rod. They swiftly moved on without a word. Despite several cups of black thick coffee, I started getting sleepy. I pulled a winged armchair close to the window, placed some fruit and nuts and a carafe of water close by and tried to keep my eyelids from closing.

The hours went slowly and painfully by. There were no suspicious sounds from outside. It must have been three o'clock in the

morning when my eyelids closed from fatigue. I woke up with a jerk at six o'clock, full of panic. I ran out. There was a sinister stillness in the garden. In the sickly morning light most of the new tulip bulbs lay scattered on the pitted ground, forsaken, ashamed of their nudity, despondent of any future. Mounds of brutally dug up earth were everywhere. No footprints or tracks were visible.

I raised my head up to the sky in despair. You are an unjust fellow, I cried, to let such things happen! Tulip bulbs never hurt anybody! It is not true they caused the first speculative bubble and economic crash! That was nothing more than the unrestrained greed of lardaceous Dutch speculators! Tulips have no original sin; they did not eat forbidden apples or consort with treacherous snakes! They do not do unto their neighbors what they are afraid of having done to them. Why, why can you not protect such virginal innocence, such trusting defenselessness? Why can't you instead hurl brimstone and fire on the corrupt, wicked, and greedy people who cut down ancient forests, pollute the air, and take the life of innocent creations? Where is your fierce hand of retribution and justice? Flood the coasts and plains, freeze the tropics and melt the ice caps, but leave alone my tulips and my precious garden! You did create once a garden too, did you not? I don't know if it was as beautiful and joyful as mine, though. Paintings and poems suggest so but painters and poets are so pumped up with alcohol and drugs they usually imagine things as they could, or should, have been, not as they actually were. And the sad truth is you did do things in a real hurry, did you not? Six days only? No wonder so many of them turned sour at the end. It has taken me over thirty years to bring my garden to its perfection.

My pulse was racing, my brain was throbbing, my forehead was on fire. This world in man's innocence was an entrancing garden and beneficent gods walked there and commuted fondly with their creatures. Our first parents were placed there to be happy, before sin and sorrow were known. But what we have today is a despicable world that does not appreciate excellence or the poetry of nature, or respect the sacred bonds of men and earth! A place of pastoral and virtuous beauty is not acceptable! Hypocrisy, greed, selfishness, underhandedness, and savagery is all they know.

I raised again my fist to the sky. I did not care. He could strike

me down with his lightning if he dared or could. He had no legitimate claim on my respect. As I held my hand up, it touched the leaves of a low branch from the majestic white oak overhanging the garden. It was such a tree! People from all over the region came to gaze and take pictures. The local press often wrote brief glowing pieces on it. Over one hundred feet tall, and as wide, it was thought to be over four hundred years old. Its acorns must have fed countless generations of starving Indians and wild turkeys. Its long leaves, silvery in spring, turned deep green in the summer and flaming red in the autumn. A gently peeling ash-grey bark covered its massive trunk. That's it, I thought! This is why I don't see footprints! The scoundrels climb on the tree and hang down the branches to dig the bulbs out!

I called a tree company to cut down the white oak. It took a great many sturdy men and huge trucks and two days to complete the job. Hundreds of people watched silent or crying. It served them well! The oak tree will now pass into the local legends like the Tree of Knowledge. Another company mounted all over the garden motion-activated cameras and blinding floodlights that swept the grounds at night. Dozens of foothold steel traps and conibear traps were placed everywhere with tulip bulbs for bait. It was most unfortunate that for this the flower beds had to be dug up. I am afraid it could not be avoided. People have always fought and died for liberty and the love of privacy and safety is no less natural to man. Five feet of barbed wire was strung all around on top of the stone wall. The workers' boots scraped off the moss.

I glanced once again all around me. Gone forever were the soft apricot hues of the sweet-smelling Autumn Sunset or the breath-taking beauty of the Carefree Wonder roses, the assorted blues, greens, and yellows of the hostas, the regal Pee Gee hydrangeas, the Tall and Bearded irises, the joyous twining around the trellis of the Etoile Violette clematis, the "Stella d'Oro" daylilies, the late-blooming lobelias, the sweet alyssum and the ornamental grasses, the profuse bloom of the gaillardias, the wax-bells, the autumn monkshood, the aromatic perovskia shrubs. Gone were the playful little jewels of the toad lilies, the crimson splendor of the "Autumn Fire" sedum, the golden heads and fluted yellow petals of coreopsis tickseed, the dark purple foliage and fragrant white flowers of the autumn snakeroot, the Japanese

painted and shield ferns, the suave lilac saffron crocuses with their precious and flavorful red stigmas. A picture of barren, wretched, stark and gloomy desolation has now taken their place. Truth be told, there is a spine-chilling, frightening beauty in this utter devastation.

I thought, with some melancholy of the other garden, its creator destroyed to punish people for their perfidy. It had been an earthly portal to heaven and eternal happiness. What had really become of it? Most likely a desert, some of it soaked with smelly and viscous oil.

I had to be prepared, too. I bought two Auto Assault 12 gauge combat shotguns loaded with FRAG 12 grenade rounds and laid them by my side. I was assured they are the deadliest weapons for home protection. They can spit out three hundred lethal rounds per minute. I stacked Army rations by the bay window and pulled a portable potty by my winged chair.

It is now the third day of my vigil. I have hardly slept. Have not washed or shaved. Benzedrine tablets have kept me awake although I do feel feverish and tired. The phone has rung often but I have not answered. I don't want "them" to know I am here, watching, my finger ready on the shotgun trigger. Because the day of my cruel wrath is here and my fierce anger and fury shall be poured out upon this place, upon man and upon beast, and will destroy the sinners and lay the land desolate. They shall not be lamented, neither gathered nor buried, but they shall be dung upon the ground, for I will punish the world for its evil and the wicked for their iniquity. I am just and righteous and I will not tolerate wickedness but I shall bring vengeance and judgment. In virtue—real, uncompromising virtue—lies true happiness and I am just and virtuous.

## Jackie White Rogers

### REST IN FRANCE

If it weren't for Amy Carter, I probably would have quit school in the fourth grade. School held little mystery or intrigue—all preposition this and long division that. I wanted to be wowed. I wanted to take some beautiful nugget of education to the supper table, roll it around in my head like so many peas by the mashed potatoes, then serve it up to parents who'd always get around to "what did you learn in school today?"

My teachers didn't get the fact that I needed a trump card. Okay, fine, I'll diagram your sentence and I'll recite a rhyme about Columbus sailing the ocean blue, but you've got to give me something too. Tell me that it's the male seahorse that has the babies, that my intestines strung out straight would reach across the county, that butterflies taste with their feet. If I come home with anything less than the eleven herbs and spices of the Colonel's secret recipe, I've got nothing.

The competition in my house was fierce. My brothers, four and ten years older than me, already knew the basics and actually held expertise in other areas. Chuck could talk small engines and go cart racing, Jeff knew music and motorcycles. How could I, a scrawny nine year old with little more than a working knowledge of the stove, compete with that?

So about April, when spring replaced the marrow in my bones, I got restless. I gave school an F on its report card. So I'd learned to add fractions and I'd papier mâché'd the heck out of baking soda and vinegar volcanoes, but what real information did I have? I devised a three part plan of truancy that required a jacked up thermometer, Halloween make up and Ipecac. I figured that by Derby day my sick bed would be peppered with the glitter from the get well cards of my classmates.

When the three o'clock bell rang on what I considered one of my last days of school, I peddled away from that den of tedium toward Arl and Carl's store for a pack of Bubble Yum on credit. I decided to take my grape goodness to a more secure location to open it. I

wheeled across the gravel parking lot behind the store and through the strip of grass that led back toward the bank, but when I rounded the corner, a big blue bus of a thing was blocking my way. I walked my bike around it looking up at the posters in the windows and books that must have been piled from floor to ceiling and an air conditioner wedged in a back window.

As soon as I made it to the door, I saw a poster of Amy Carter with the letters R-I-F across the top. She was reading a book with a big smile on her face. I loved Amy Carter. I wanted to be Amy Carter. Until that year, I had no idea that a president could have children and I certainly didn't even dream of one being allowed to live in the White House. When I saw her on TV I thought how much she was like me. She was three months older, went to public school, had to eat vegetables, the whole nine yards. She even looked like a kid you might pick fifth or sixth for your kickball team.

The door ratcheted open about halfway, startling me, then jerkily cranked on out. A lady about my mom's age sat sideways in the driver's seat. She said, "You want to come in?"

A peculiar bus suddenly appears and a stranger asks you to get in. I felt like I was on the verge of being the topic of the next after school special. I stood between the handlebars and seat of my bike, moving it from side to side and said, "I don't know." We both knew I was going in. The question was how many seconds and how much candy would it take?

"Here," she said and dug a Tootsie Roll Pop out of a paper bag.

I dropped the kickstand and climbed the stairs, felt the air cool ten degrees with each step, and took the sucker. She shut the door behind me and said, "Can't air condition the whole town."

"What is this place?" Her body language suggested it was okay that I make myself at home. I wandered the twelve steps to the back and marveled at how much stuff could fit in a bus. There were shelves full of books, racks of magazines, a whole gaggle of bookmarks and close to the front, kind of tucked in under a bookshelf, was a bean bag.

"We're having a contest for the summer. You can win prizes." I sank into the beans and she handed me a brochure. "You can win a prize for reading the most books or for the longest book or if you're

the first one to figure out what ‘RIF’ stands for,” she opened the brochure for me and pointed to prize choices and book lists. She went on about details and official rules, but she had me at “contest.”

I’d been looking for something to get me in the *Guinness Book of World Records* for a few years, and this could be my thing. However, I would be satisfied with winning a pair of shoes with big springs on the bottom.

“Sign me up.” I got up and skimmed shelves for skinny books and answered her questions.

She got all my vitals and then asked, “What kind of books do you like to read?” Was she kidding? I *could* read and I enjoyed the Jack Tales that my librarian read to us, but no one liked to read, did they? Picked it over riding bikes or playing leap frog over the tombstones in the cemetery?

I just shrugged and pulled out the first book I came to. It was about a quarter of an inch thick. I held it up to her. “Big fan of Queen Elizabeth, I see.” I looked at the front cover and then shoved it back in its slot. She came to me with a light blue paperback. “I’m pretty sure you’ll like this better.”

The title was intriguing and the lady was so nice I couldn’t refuse. If nothing else I’d employ the old skim and scan method that the school librarian kept throwing around. I figured if I made it through this book and maybe four more there was no way I could lose, especially if I could keep this little temperature-controlled gold mine a secret.

“So I’ll see you in a couple of days?” she formed it as a question, but it was more of suggestion, an appointment I was meant to keep. And to seal the deal, she handed me a pack of Sixlets and a book-mark.

It took three days to finish *Are You There God? It’s Me, Margaret* and I immediately started jonesing for Judy Blume. Ms. Bookmobile Lady flung the door open when she saw me peddle my Huffly across Stanford Street toward her. “So, how’d you like it?”

“I loved it,” was all I was willing to say. I didn’t want to talk religion or about getting a period or about boys, not with the bookmobile lady. I just headed straight for the third shelf down right behind the driver’s seat where I’d seen her pluck *Margaret* off the shelf. She



pointed to the Blu on the spine of the book and suddenly the system revealed itself. I wanted to check out *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*, *Otherwise Known as Sheila the Great*, and *Blubber*. “Let’s try two at a time, and then you can come back for the rest.”

At this rate I was a shoo-in as national grand champion or whatever title they would bestow upon me. “By the way, I figured out what RIF means too.” I’d given this a lot of thought over the past few days. The first two letters were obvious, but the “F” was tricky. But it came to me out of the blue during math.

“Really?” she pulled out a notebook to record my answer.

I stood up straighter and proclaimed, “Rest in France.”

Her pen went slack and she looked at me over a scrunched up nose. I gestured toward the pad with a nod and she grudgingly recorded it. “That’s a good first guess, but no, that’s not it. Keep thinking though.”

I spent the night with my cousin, Fran, that Friday night and committed a fatal error at the supper table. Calvin, her oldest brother, wondered out loud about the blue bus in the bank parking lot.

“I’ve been in it,” I bragged.

“No you haven’t.”

All eyes were on me. “It’s a bookmobile, stupid. It’s got books and stuff. It’s pretty neat.”

Calvin was incredulous. He said, “Way to go to school after school.”

“It’s not school. It’s a library, kind of.” We all liked the public library. It had an elevator and a tree upstairs. He twirled his index finger in a whoopdeedo gesture. “And there’s candy. I eat all the free candy I want.” Now I had everyone’s attention. “And there’s a contest and I’m winning so far.” Candy and contest. Why had I said that? No one family was chock full of more fierce competitors than this one.

“What kind of contests?” Calvin asked.

“What kind of candy?” Kurt, the youngest, asked.

I turned most of my attention back to my macaroni and cheese. “Oh, mostly reading and stuff.”

And then it was on. We hardly marked the end of school we were so intent on being the first to the bookmobile and speed reading our way through S.E. Hinton, Shel Silverstein, Laura Ingalls Wilder,

Franklin W. Dixon, C.S. Lewis, and Beverly Cleary. Even when we weren't checking out books, we'd race to the bookmobile filling up her notebook with our RIF guesses: Remember I'm First, Run It Fast, Ride in Front and so on. Ms. Wanda enjoyed this as much as our new found love for books.

At one point at the crack of August, I discovered my cousin Calvin had racked up so many points in our contest there was no way I could win. I suspected cheating, but it's hard to prove that sort of thing in a reading contest. I fell back into old habits. I thought I'd just quit. I did want to finish *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* first though.

I curled up on the couch beside my mom to watch the Friday night movie, reading a few pages during the commercials.

"Good book?" Mom asked, reading over my shoulder, stroking my hair.

I wobbled my hand back and forth out in front of me in the so-so motion as if I had obtained quite a discerning taste in the past two months.

"Well, I know you like chocolate, so it's probably pretty good." She had my grandmother's knack for spin. It didn't help. I went to bed.

The next morning I made it through Looney Tunes and was adding more Fruity Pebbles to my blue milk when Rosalyn and Amy Carter came on the screen. I went through my seven stages of Amy (recognition, excitement, envy, anger, despair, resignation, contentment) in a millisecond then followed her and her mom into a kid-filled room in the White House. There were kids everywhere with books and they were so excited. Carol Burnett, my idol and role model stood toe-to-toe with the girl I intended to body snatch and told us all that "Reading is Fun...damental."

Rosalyn Carter then asked everyone, "Who likes to read?" The kids, Amy, Carol, Arthur Ashe, and I all raised our hands. And as if my hair was on fire, I was up and running. I slipped my Holly Hobbie gown off and threw on a terry cloth shirt and shorts in a frenzy, hopped toward the door while putting on my shoes, ignored my tatted hair, out the door and peddled down Spring St., through the graveyard, across the railroad tracks, up Taylor Hill, through the bank parking lot to the Bookmobile. I sucked air for several minutes, leaning on the

driver's chair in the bookmobile. "I've got it," I managed to get out.

This wasn't our first rodeo. She drug out the notebook. "Hit it," she said with her Papermate already on the line.

"Reading is fun!" I said. "Or maybe it's fundamental." I stood tall there on the bus steps waiting for my reward.

"You're right," she smiled and closed the notebook without writing anything down. "RIF does stand for Reading is Fun, but somebody guessed it about two weeks ago. Sorry. I didn't tell you because your answers were so interesting. How'd you figure it out?"

I was too busy kissing the shoes with big springs on the bottom goodbye to get too excited about it, but I said, "Amy Carter told me."

"How nice," and she said it like she thought it possible that I could have talked to Amy Carter.

I checked out *The Hobbit*, the fattest paperback in the bus, slid a bookmark into the middle, helped myself to some cherry lifesavers and headed home to discover little holes in the earth where hairy footed creatures drank tea and avoided adventures.

Years later, when I finished college and began teaching English at the high school, I started using the public library again. On my first visit I ran into the Bookmobile Lady. She remembered me right off the bat and we talked about the events in our lives over the past decade. She had somehow kept up with mine. Finally, I thanked her for her hand in my life's choices.

"I was always terrified," I confessed, "that I was going to come to town one day and the bookmobile would be gone."

Wanda laughed, taking off her glasses and putting them on top of her head. "That thing didn't even have a motor."

"Really?"

"And didn't you ever notice that all four tires were flat?" She took *Angela's Ashes* out of my hand, scanned it, and handed it back with a smile, a due date slip and a pineapple dum dum. "Enjoy. See you in a few."

## Karen Salyer McElmurray

### COMING CLEAN

My body is full of itchy light. I'm tied down by morphine and arm tubes and a monitor that keeps time with my heart. I want to sleep, but I'm lost instead in worry. *Applications. Proposals. Thesis students. Defenses. Offenses. Submissions. Guidelines. CV's. Cover letters. Reference letters.* Words, ground to an irritating powder, drain from an IV into my blood. Hours pass. My mouth, dry and bitter tasting, is open and I am whispering, in delirious conversation with someone I don't know. *Who is it, John, my husband, asks. Hush now.* He feeds me ice chips.

Months after this surgery, I will discuss what I remember from my morphine dreams with my friends. Don't you know who you were talking with, they say. Back from the world of my abdomen's invasion, I will think about those women who have shown me who I am.

My mother was the keeper of rules. The OCD's relentless laws of clean. *Can't you do you a thing right,* she'd say to my father over and over in the winter as he crawled underneath the house, looking for that one stray speck of dust in the heating vents. When he'd finally had enough, he took her back to her parent's house. She was thirty-five years old then.

For almost forty years my mother has told me she wished she'd done something with herself after high school. *Gone on to business school. Learned to be a secretary or a nurse or a kindergarten teacher.* Used to be, when I'd go to visit her, she'd have the Kentucky Driver's License Manual sitting out on the coffee table. She'd have underlined key phrases about parallel parking, caution signs and turn signals. She'd wave the manual in my face. *I just might learn how to drive,* she'd say. *I ought to.* These days, my mother has escaped to another life altogether via dementia. At night when she's sleeping in the room next to mine, I'll hear her in there breathing. Talking a little in her sleep. Dreaming of one long highway, the way out she never took.

At fifteen, I became a runaway on the streets of Columbia, Missouri. If I count that apartment where I lived with a bunch of junkies and other runaways, if I count all the other apartments, trailers, and rental houses I've inhabited over the last decades, I've lived in thirty-seven places. Jobs? Cook, maid, secretary, landscaper, sporting towel folder, greenhouse worker. I see myself signing up for MFA Programs, MA Programs, Doctoral Programs. I'm Visiting Assistant Professor, Writer in Residence, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, Professor-on-her-way-to-the-stars. Books are written. Papers mount on my kitchen table. I cross genres and state lines. I am climbing an invisible rope that burns my hands. I am, as one of my best friends tells me, driven.

Over the years the drives I like most are these: Highway 40 West, forty-eight hours straight between Kentucky and Arizona with coffee and a 1967 Dodge Dart, its engine block patched with stove cement. The drive between the Grand Canyon and Flagstaff, Arizona, at night, electrical wires over the road, tentacles made of snow, me on acid and the iced roads rising and falling. Back roads between Tallahassee and St. George Island with the truck driver I loved, a pistol on the seat between us to fire between shots of vodka and the scurry of armadillos into the ditch. Drives to airports, drives to cities linked by outdated maps, drives all night to get to lovers who aren't really mine. I have discovered that blacktop can sing, urging you home.

When I was little and we drove home to Eastern Kentucky, I'd go with my mother and her sisters to visit my Aunt Della's service station and diner. On Sunday afternoons I'd sit under the tables while, above me, the women talked and exchanged news about their eyeliner and lipsticks and husbands. Usually Aunt Della, in her greasy coveralls, stopped by the table to smoke a Winston and swap a story about Russell, my uncle, who often laid out at night drinking and playing poker.

Aunt Della fixed brakes, changed oil, fried eggs, paid the bills. It was the 1950s. My Aunt, they say, was odd-turned. *Contrary*. I've written stories about her, her big hands, black-streaked and strong from hard work they did. I imagine her reaching down into some vat of soaking spark plugs, some geography of wires and hoses. What message did the faulty hearts of engines send back?

Following my diagnosis of stage three colorectal cancer in December 2007, I did my usual work. I was in my office the day before the surgery, planning student thesis examinations, wondering if I could make it over there in a wheel chair a couple weeks after the surgery. I ended up with chemo, radiation, another surgery, more chemo and almost two years of relearning my body.

Rather than self-understanding, I fell subject to even greater self-scrutiny. How behind had this pesky illness made me in my professional life? What to do to remedy matters? *Be more assertive? Less? Speak up more? Say things more carefully?* Think, as a friend of mine says, of this internal dialogue as a bit of mental lint. But I became even more aware of the face I present to the world, the faculty meeting, the internet posting. I found myself lost between the world and myself.

Between is a land where many of the women in my family have gone. Aunt Ruth, sick for over twenty years now following her son's shotgun suicide, seldom leaves her trailer where she lives. Illness has traveled from place to place in her body—gout in her legs, arthritis in her arms, diabetes in the blood she checks with a little at-home glucose kit. She suffers from migraines, alopecia, fluid retention, sleep apnea. Out her trailer's back window, in the small family cemetery, she can see her son's grave.

On the one hand in my family, there are the women who stayed put and suffered. On the other hand, there are the women who headed west, took the hard road out. There was my Uncle Roy's second wife, Betty, the one who up and left for Detroit to become a go-go dancer. There was Della's granddaughter, the one who became, as the family said, a Big Lawyer and moved away to some northern city and never came back. And I'm the real black sheep, been to so much school my grandfather used to wonder when it was going to start working on me. I spin the wheel of family, try to stop on the name of the woman I want to be.

My earliest memories of my grandmother, Fannie Salyer, are the musical sounds of canning jars sealing themselves. She could identify wild greens by the dozens—polk, cressy, poor man's bacon—and an

abundance of herbs, Ginseng and Solomon's Seal and Yellow Root. She made quilts with names like Trip Around the World from thrift-store cloth, colors so delicious they make my mouth water. Who she was has followed me these fifty two years of my life.

I can see her heading out to the coal pile, hatchet in hand. *Warm's you twice*, she'd say. She was a child of the Depression and she saved sharp slivers of soap, slag coal to burn, saved the least bit of fatback for the next pot of greens. She hauled slop and baskets of cans and bottles, pitched it all down into the muddy creek by the house. She pinched pennies, dressed herself out of the Mountain Mission store, took care of herself for thirty-odd years of widowhood. In the last years of her life, her house was rampant with silverfish and water bugs I could hear crawling at night, their tiny legs shuffling over the quilts that kept me warm. Mercy, she'd say when I went to visit her in the home before she died. *Just who are you, anyway?*

Following her death almost a decade ago, I dream her often. I have dreamed her standing in a doorway, a brittle plank to her house the only way I can walk to safety. When I was in the hospital following my surgery, when I lay laughing and talking with someone unseen, I don't doubt it was her, sending me messages about surviving in this world. Today, I have some things of hers I've inherited. One is a knife, its blade so thin with use it's like paper. I can still see her veiny hands gripping that knife, peeling one more ripe tomato from the garden. A mercy as tempered as steel.

*Mercy and goodness.* In the months following my illness I begin to imagine myself, metaphorically speaking, as my childhood heroine, Joan of Arc. Once I'm back at work and heading up the steps into the building where I work, I imagine myself fully armored and on the back of a white steed, my hand raised with its earth-changing sword. I'm in remission, I tell myself. *Everything will be different, now.* I'm not back in the department where I work more than an hour when one of my colleagues encounters me in the hall. I'm so glad you're back, she says conspiratorially. We need allies. Allies? I ask. Think of it as coup, she says. I try, for a while, not to think of it at all, but soon find myself caught up in the same intrigues and collusions, allegiances and factualisms that academia has always seemed prone to. Nevertheless,

I tell myself that I will remain clear in my thinking. I will be honest with myself and others and base my changed life, my new course of action, on compassion and honesty. When another colleague of mine, one is who is acting division head, tells me more than I want to know about his route to tenure and then about his lunch plans (a gathering of information endeavor; a time to put out political fires right and left) I try out my new work ethic. Don't you see, I say. This is even more hierarchical thinking than we usually get, when the real chair is around? He tells me I'm malicious. Crazy. Delusional. We send each other angry emails and, remission or none, I head home to hide in bed with my orange-striped cat, a food-oriented conspirator in his own right.

While I'm in bed, trying to summon images of myself and my earth-changing steed and sword, I think again about my Aunt Della, the one with the service station and the poker-playing, womanizing husband. Della could gunk an engine and set the points on a 1966 Chevy Malibu without even looking up the gap. During some winter in my childhood that I can no longer recall specifically, Della locked her husband out one night and he left the heater running in his car, to stay warm. They found him the next morning, curled up, lifeless face against the seat as if it were his lover. She kept the station going, but nothing was ever the same after that. Dust balls gathered in the diner corners and you could reach your hands under the tables and feel the hard little kernels of old chewing gum. One memory collides with another in my consciousness. Della's clean engines, the ones she lost interest in, later on. My own experiences with work that seem to me tainted. What to do with a life that is changed forever?

Does this story have an ending? Woman wakes from morphine dreams believing in the possibilities for redefining her life. She holds her belly's seam when she stands, hurts as she walks step by step toward at the end of a hall. She watches the choices of her life precede her, papers and deadlines and the faces of students clinging to the sleeves of her hospital gown. Later, she sits on the edge of a bed and cannot untie her own slippers. She is alright with that, this simple failure of her fingers to produce the correct result. Words elude her. She imagines a window opening, clean air pouring in. Everything she has been, all the pages of herself, is vanishing. She studies a bedside table. Mir-



ror. Comb. Water glass. Her life is so small it can fit in a palm, on an empty plate she can accept or refuse. She curls herself around pillows, slides into what is possible. Her own success measured by value, not by the failures or achievements of others. Her words a gift, commerce of her own spirit. And this time? Fallow, still, not a product of what she cannot do, cannot be? Authority? Her own. The source of art itself. She dreams of her body rising from the long sleep of illness.

Ryan Allen

## THE FROGS

*All other creatures look down toward the earth, but man was given a face so that he might turn his eyes toward the stars and his gaze upon the sky.* —OVID

There are three of us walking at night. Walking away from Camp Tall Trees, where we are counselors. Walking away from our individual tribes—Seneca, Sioux, and Shawnee, our cabins, and our kids who should be in their bunks but probably aren't. Walking down the darkened pool trail without any flashlights. Walking, waiting for our nocturnal eyes to emerge, for our pupils to dilate properly, for the rhodopsin to kick in so that we can make out the outlines of trees lining the path, the branches and rocks littering our course, and the trail that leads us out and away from Camp.

Tonight, it's particularly dark outside. It's the beginning of July and the moon is not yet new. The sky above, one hundred percent free of clouds.

Past the spot where our camp pool used to be, where we used to make whirlpools, where we used to dunk kids, where we used to have diving board belly-flop contests, where counselors used to pick up and gather all the kids' towels, tie them around their necks like capes and pretend to be super-counselors, running and hollering and screaming like madmen before springing, leaping, and vaulting into the air off the diving board into the water, past that spot, the three of us walk, seeing now just the filled-in aqua cement outline of that place where all those things used to be, where all that action used to happen. We walk past this place until we are clear and free of the narrow tree-lined path and onto the Buffalo Trail.

Without thinking, without speaking, we three turn left.

If we would have turned right we would have passed the Pipeline and Clancy's Cave, would have passed the broken tree vine rope swing where I once saw Kedrick Osborne crash and tumble and fall down a rock cliff and nearly kill himself; and if we would have kept

going we would have eventually made it to Otter Creek, the namesake, the torch-bearer of this park in which we work, where we would take the kids on Wednesdays, “Hike Day,” to splash, to play, to make mudslides, to get wet and dirty and muddy and stinky and smelly and all the other things you’re supposed to get at summer camp.

But the three of us did not turn right. After a brief pause, we turn left.

Walking.

Down the spine, the tall grassy vertebrae of the Buffalo, where the paths are wide, where the sky is unobstructed by branches, where tonight, in all its darkness, there is no light.

We don’t walk long, though, the three of us, before we get to the paved road, the main artery of the park, the avenue to take cars to Camp Tecumseh, to Pine Grove, to our own Camp Tall Trees. But we do not take that road. Our hike, our night, had only just begun. Besides, we would never take the road.

So, we cross it.

The three of us cross the road and pass the gazebo, the same gazebo where two years earlier on a similar night-hike, only with two, not the three like tonight, I got naked with a girl named Guinevere. I stop for a second to look at that gazebo to my left, to remember that night, to examine the spot where I lay on top of her, the spot where my bare-naked full moon, rising high in the warm night air, got a quarter-sized mosquito bite on it.

It’s only for a second, though, that we stop, the three of us here tonight, before we continue along on the trail.

We move onward, past the gazebo, the three of us, toward the Park Nature Center up ahead of us now. We don’t know why, but as we walk, we notice the light posts usually illuminating the building ahead aren’t lit. The lights aren’t lit, but by this point, it doesn’t matter. We don’t need any light to see. We can see everything now, all that is laid out before us; can make out the dozens of different shades of black unfolded: raven and raisin, an ebony piano key, a shiny sports car, typewriter ribbon ink, some burnt toast; our eyes adjusted to the darkness, our minds involuntarily twitching our muscles, moving our feet mechanically in the direction each of us, the three of us, had walked what seems like a million times before.

The air, the space in front of our faces, is black, but there might as well be a runway of lights directly leading or guiding or pointing our way. Our minds, our muscles, our feet carry us to a pond, which feels to our feet, to our soles, to our senses, more like a marsh. Our arms swing back and forth and back again through tall, wild grass caressing the tips of our fingers as they swing and pass.

To this point, the three of us are mostly silent save the occasional joke about hooking up with someone from the nearby girl's camp or some plan to get drunk and grill out once the kids leave on Saturday. But at the marshy pond, in a kind of collective silence, in some mode of our shared collective mind, we stop and are still. We look at one another, then, at once, the three of us look to the sky. Up there, a billion diamond rings, wedding wishes for millions of brides. To the north, the big bear, the butterfly-netted Big Dipper; to its east, the queen, the M-shaped Cassiopeia; below the queen, the jester's hat, the crooked house-shaped seven star Cepheus; next to that, the minor bear, Ursa, and the super-bright Polaris, the guide, the navigator of ancient times. We see Vega and find the Summer Triangle, then the eagle, then the tea-shaped archer, Sagittarius, pointing its arrow at Scorpius, the scorpion. Each of us, the three of us, rotating 360 degrees on a swivel, each of us pointing out to one another what we see—what we see we know. Our necks, our heads bent back gazing, trying to guess at all the other stars we see, the other patterns, the ones we can't quite make out, the ones we don't yet know.

And all the while as we're looking, a slow and steady murmur vibrates amidst the ground, amongst the grasses below and around us; at first like a running refrigerator, a leaky faucet, a low-toned steady hum, a quiet engine purr. So much time spent gazing up, we forget to listen to what was all around. At first the sounds are non-distinct, not separate. A low-pitched *ribbit* here, a high-pitched *ribbit* there. But once we lower our heads, once we fix our ears, once we listen and not just hear, the sounds become clear, crisp, different, definite, explicit, distinct. Then it sounds like a thousand different people from a thousand different countries speaking a thousand different languages at once. It sounds like an open channel of communication on a short-wave radio or synapses firing across a telephone wire or a cell phone satellite; all of it together, a marching band, a parade, an orchestra, a

symphony of sound. Mating calls. Some sound like shoes squishing through mud. Some sound like shuffling papers. Others sound like moving tape ripping from a box. Still others sound like ducks even though we all know they're frogs. One even sounds like a cow mooing. Another like a gorilla's *ooh-ooh-ahh-ahh*. Several we know are bullfrogs and they sound like a broken aboriginal didgeridoo. Some sound like birds. Others sound like farts, like someone sitting on a whoopy-cushion. Another sounds like a drummer banging a wood block. One frog is a deep-voiced Barry White. Another hits the high notes like Al Green. One sings from his gut like Otis Redding. One moans like James Brown.

The frogs are everywhere. Hundreds of them everywhere, surrounding us in all directions, boxing us in whatever, whichever direction we turn.

We stand there over an hour I think, looking up, gazing, looking around, listening. The stars, silent, bright. The frogs, invisible, full of sound.

The symphony, it never ends, but we leave, figuring we'd been away from Camp long enough that our kids are probably running around the woods like crazy realizing that we're not there. So we walk on, the three of us, away from the pond, away from the frogs, away, until their chorus is just an echo of sound, a stir you hear to shake you from your dreams. Walking back, the three of us don't say much to one another. Looking at each other, though, all of us know what's in the other's mind. *Was that real? Did we really just hear that? Were all those frogs having an orgy at our feet on the ground? Did they get any of it on our shoes?*

Yet now, even some ten years later, when it's quiet out, when there is no moon, when the skies are clear and minus any clouds, when there are no buildings to obstruct it, if I put an ear to the ground, I can still feel their vibration. Like they're calling me, I can hear the frogs. Still, even now.

And all these years later, sitting here far away from Kentucky, far from Otter Creek Park, which is now closed, far from Camp Tall Trees, which has since been torn to the ground, I remember what I

once learned in astronomy class my freshman year of college: that the light we see from stars is already behind us, that the stars we're staring at are already countless generations of light years gone.

And at first it makes me kind of sad to think about it, that we marvel at what's been dead so long. But then I realize that not all of it is *really* gone. The only proof I need is the light we see. *You can't destroy space, you can't destroy energy, you can't destroy consciousness*, I find myself thinking. Energy does not die; it merely transfers. Camp Tall Trees, its cabins, the shuffleboard courts, the horseshoe pits, the Mess Hall, all of it bulldozed over now. And the three of us, well, the three of us may not live huddled together in a tiny, closet-sized one-room cabin anymore, and we may not be taking any night hikes together on any trails anymore either, but so long as we all look upward at night, we're all still staring at the same sky, the same stars, and at the very least, the three of us will always have the frogs.

**Beth Newberry**

## **THE CENTER OF THE COMPASS**

*Bristol, Tennessee, Summer, 1980*

I sit at my great-grandmother's kitchen table, kicking my feet back and forth. I want to reach the floor, but my legs aren't long enough. Instead I kick them backwards and my heels hit the edge of the seat, and then on the swing forward I hit the underside of the table. I am three years old, and I am eating a breakfast I wouldn't be allowed at home—whole milk and cinnamon Life cereal. I lean on the table, elbows flat on the wood-top, leaning into the bowl. Less manners, more sugar. This is one of the best mornings of my life so far.

Sitting at the end of the table, I can see in three directions. I am in the center of the compass. My mom and I are visiting Miss Lu. To my right is the long hallway with dark-wooden floors all the way to the front door. It's open and through the screen door I peek at cement pots of red geraniums.

In front of me, just beyond the table, I notice the narrow screened back porch where we sit and snap beans. I take one at a time—I'm not strong enough to break two at a time—from the colander where they have been washed clean, snap it and put it in a big pot where the beans will be boiled later. The screen door bangs shut and then bounces once before closing against the doorframe.

To my left, I can see out the window into the corner of the backyard where my older cousins play. I like to sit in this chair where I can look out the window and both doors and watch my great-grandmother, mom, or aunts at the stove.

Later, my mom's cousin Alice, whom I call my aunt, visits with her newborn daughter, my cousin Laura. I run up and down the hall because I like the sound of my black and white oxfords clapping loudly on the floorboards. I like the rising noise caught in an echo off the doors, the stairs, and the wall. From where I stand, the ceiling looks thirty feet high. My mom sits at the kitchen table, holding Laura in her arms. I can hear her say to the baby, "What's that loud noise? It's just your cousin Beth running down the hall." I am alone until I hear

my mom's voice. Just me, the hallway, and the wood floor. I have the sound of my feet and breath to keep me company.

*Louisville, Kentucky, Fall, 2007*

This is a feeling I have now when I write, the sounds of sentences forming in my head and my breath connecting me to the world beyond myself.

The table I sat at when I was three, where I could see my world from every angle, is now in the dining room of the house I share with my boyfriend, Kris. It seats four and has extensions that slide out from under the ends to provide two additional place settings. The rectangular tabletop has, in each corner, fine, hand-painted detail that looks like two bass clefs jointed at the colon, arching out.

My mother calls it a pickled oak table. Pickling is a finish applied to make furniture appear older, or to cover up a previous finish. It most typically is seen in shades of white. But this table is pickled in the color of pickles. It's green. In some more worn sections, it's a sun-faded moss color where the wood grain stands out more. In other sections the shade of green resembles the bud of a leaf emerging from a branch.

If it was pickled in the 20s to appear old, the table now shows age in scuff marks on the table top and chairs made either from daily use, or the multiple moves the table has endured since it was taken from Miss Lu's house when my family placed her in a nursing home in 1986. I was nine when my family got the table. We were living in Harlan County, Kentucky.

*Harlan, Kentucky, Summer, 1986*

This summer we just moved. We rent a house on the side of a mountain, called Ivy Hill, but its very, very tall for a hill. From the front of the house I can see trees and other houses where old people live, no kids. From one side of the house I can see the neighbor's yard and their big, big dogs—a German Shepherd and a Doberman Pincer. There's a tall fence between them and me, but I stay away from that side of the house. From the other side of the house and the backyard,



all I can see are trees, tall with leaves, and fallen ones, too, that mark the steep slope down into an empty creek.

Sometimes my dad will take me on walks there, but during the day I watch some television. I like to see the Statue of Liberty's getting a facelift, that's what my mom calls it. The news says it's the Statue of Liberty's two-hundredth birthday. I want to go see it getting fixed up. But instead, every day I read the papers. Reading the news makes me want to be a news reporter. I cover the kitchen table with newspapers, tracing paper, scissors, glue, and colored pencils—it's my own news desk. My uncle is a reporter, too. But he lives in Seattle and has an office in a big city. From my office in the kitchen I see the back deck and tree trunks. From here, I compose my commemorative newspaper, *The Statue of Liberty: Special Edition*.

Of course, I can't leave Harlan for any of my duties. I make the trek between television and kitchen table to read the *Harlan Daily-Independent*, *USA Today*, and the *Lexington Herald-Leader*; all of my investigative reporting is second hand.

For the cover photo of my paper, I take tracing paper and copy the full photo of Liberty as it is projected to look. I cut out the television schedule for full coverage of the bicentennial celebration.

While my project is underway, I want one more thing: a Fedora. I have seen reporters wear them—or is it detectives? No matter, a Fedora with a press badge on it like I've seen in 40s black and white movies on television would make me a real journalist.

"Mom, I need one of those hats with the sign in it that says PRESS," I tell her.

"You mean a Fedora?"

"Sure. Yes. With a badge in it," I say. She isn't convinced that I have to have one.

"Where would we get a fedora?" she says. "How about a press badge?"

So we settle on a press badge instead. My mom finds an old nametag with a plastic sleeve. She turns the tag to the blank side and takes a big black marker and writes PRESS in block letters. She has been a teacher before and has good handwriting so the letters are all straight and perfect; it looks official. I wear it everywhere for a couple of weeks. I want a reporter's notebook, too, but can only find a large

steno pad. I try to teach myself shorthand from the chart on the inside back cover.

After a week of clipping articles at the table and keeping files of important research—clearing it off only for meals because my mom makes me—I render draft after draft of drawings of the statue. I tape all my articles on to sheets of continuous feed computer paper. I have visions of delivering my product door to door with a ready speech.

“What a remarkable event is right around the corner,” I would say. “With so much in the news about the miraculous occasion, don’t you want a commemorative newspaper to remember the event? To help you celebrate?” I only plan on charging only one dollar. My mom reminds me I am performing a public service, one that should be done at no charge.

The week before the big unveiling occurs on TV, my mom takes me to the county library, the only public place in town with a copier. The Harlan County Library is one of the other places I spend time in the summer; my mom and I both like to read. The building looks old and so do the women who work there. It’s time to go to press and I have a backpack filled with my originals and my bag of change. I take my original manuscript and a sandwich bag of dimes I have scavenged from the family change jar without my parents noticing.

I set up my print shop by the copier. *Clink, clink, clink, clink, clink*—in go the dimes. I need to make 10 copies of my one-sided newspaper, starting with the cover I designed with the traced photo and my headline, “Happy Birthday, Lady Liberty!” I lay it flat on the glass and hit the green copy button. The light shines through the sides of the machine, even with the lid closed. The rays stretch out three of the four sides, like the points on a crown. My mom makes stacks of each page and helps me gather them into single copies and staple each in the corner.

The next day I fasten on my press badge and practice my speech. I pick up a basket with issues spread out and go door to door and hand out my creation. I am offered a dollar by one elderly couple, but don’t take it; I accept peanut butter fudge instead.

*Lexington, Kentucky, Fall 1993*

In my tenth grade English class, I am writing my first short story. After school, I sit at the side seat of the pickled-oak table, where I can stare into the patchwork quilt of neighboring grass lawns of the subdivision. I am writing a story called “Gloria.” The table is not a comfortable place to work, and the uncushioned chairs are too firm for extended sittings. The table is a bit wobbly, but steady enough to make me feel like the table and the window I stare out are a studio for writing, at least until my parents return from work. It’s not a room of my own, but it is my table—a patient surface to work on.

I title my story “Gloria,” for both the Van Morrison song and Gloria Steinem. Gloria, the main character, reflects on scenes from her own life: her own mother, her career, and her decision to be a stay at home mom. I write the story in long hand, scene by scene. I go to school early to get advice from my English teacher and then come back to the table after school and then again after dinner to work on the next scene.

*Louisville, Kentucky, December, 2004*

Early in the month, my parents bought a new kitchen table and offered me the pickled oak table for my apartment. It sits in the middle of a room decorated with a hand made mud cloth I bought in Senegal during college. Near the wall hanging is the pickled oak corner cupboard that matches the table and chairs, which holds my wineglasses from Ikea and some contemporary-styled flower vases. The combination of items makes my decorating motif part Peace Corps, part farmhouse, and part MOMA gift shop.

Having the table in my own home, the apartment I rent and where I live alone, makes me feel full-grown. Now I have six chairs and just me to occupy the table. The empty chairs make me feel lonely. Even if I sit in a different chair and a different place setting at the table each night, I would take a week to make it all the way around.

The table has inspired me to have dinner parties and potlucks, just to have more people to fill up the space and make me feel like my table is fulfilling its purpose. My first dinner with friends is to be an initiation, of sorts, of the table being mine. Just after Christmas I have

a potluck. I cover the table with a green tablecloth and my friends filled it with lasagna, soup, salads, and homemade bread. The table is full, my apartment is full, and I felt at home.

In between dinner parties I mainly use it as a placeholder for mail, purses, pens, and books. I bought light blue and gray placemats, bright-colored cloth napkins, and silver napkin rings. I set the table and leave it meal-ready, inviting, alive.

*Louisville, Kentucky, September 2007*

I courted my boyfriend, Kris, at the table in my apartment. On our third date, we cooked dinner together—breakfast for dinner, just eggs and toast. Simple and spur of the moment. I wanted to see what it felt like to sit across from him at my great-grandmother’s kitchen table. We made a toast to each other with orange juice. He had a crooked smile resting between dimples on his cheeks.

Throughout the following year, he would cook for me when I was stressed with graduate school—we ate chicken picatta at the table. We toasted with wine. I made him vegetarian stew after a long day at work. We said cheers with bottles of Red Stripe.

After a year he asked me to move in with him. I didn’t say yes at first. I said, “Can I bring my dining room table?” Without hesitation he said yes and so did I. Now we share the table and my favorite moments are the everyday, non-consequential ones. My favorite days are the ones that end with two-hour meals sitting across the table from Kris, kicking my bare feet under the table, with empty plates centered between us.

## Dan Catomeris

### A REAL GEORGIA PEACH

*A professional sports locker room, late afternoon. Lockers line all three walls surrounding a wooden bench with coolers of Gatorade on it. There is football equipment on the floor. There are doors to the showers and to the hallway, as well as a large whiteboard and a television. On the wall is a poster featuring Jerry Rice smiling and giving a thumbs up; the text reads, "It Ain't Over Till You WIN!!!"*

ANNOUNCER (Voice Over): This afternoon Bruno Guskiewicz, Linebacker, successfully terminated play 13 times at the relatively minor price of 7 head-on collisions, with a relative force of 82 g's, 79 g's, 75 g's, 79 g's, 67 g's, 57 g's, and 91 g's, as well as three dozen lesser collisions, the g forces referring to the force gravity exerts on a resting body on the earth's surface. Twenty years from today Bruno Guskiewicz will be walking with his daughter to the car after a day at 6 Flags New England when he begins to vomit violently and passes out in the parking lot. He is rushed to Springfield Memorial Hospital and experiences violent full-body seizures for several hours. He remains stabilized but comatose for 2 weeks before succumbing to massive cerebral hemorrhage. He is 46 years old. Quote, "Mike Webster, the longtime Pittsburgh Steeler and one of the greatest players in NFL history, ended his life a recluse, sleeping on the floor of the Pittsburgh Amtrak station. Another former Pittsburgh Steeler, Terry Long, drifted into chaos and killed himself four years ago by drinking antifreeze. Andre Waters, a former defensive back for the Philadelphia Eagles, sank into depression and pleaded with his girlfriend—"I need help, somebody help me"—before shooting himself in the head. The real problem was with their heads. Among all former NFL players, at least 6.1 percent report being diagnosed with dementia, Alzheimer's Disease, or other memory-related diseases. What football must confront is not just the problem of injuries or scientific findings. It is the fact that there is

something profoundly awry in the relationship between the players and the game.” Malcolm Gladwell. October 2009.

*(Louder)*

I am a warrior.

I can block that out of my mind.

You’ve got to play with your head.

*JAKE enters with an official wearing a Buffalo Bills jacket and hat as well as a large headset. Jake is wearing a Buffalo Bills jersey and a hat. He is 17 years old. The official leaves as quickly as he arrived. JAKE looks around confused for a few moments. Tentatively he approaches a few of the lockers, the whiteboard, the TV; he looks at the Gatorade. In the background heavy Japanese drumming escalates until suddenly the door from the hallway explodes open and the BUFFALO BILLS charge in screaming. There is a great cacophony. Over the tumult JAKE yells:*

JAKE: Ford! FORD!!! YO FORD OVER HERE MAN!!

FORD: Jake? JAKE YOU MADE IT!! Alright man!

*JAKE and FORD make their way through the crowd of fist pounding, high-fiving, chest bumping players.*

JAKE: Ford, that was incredible man!

FORD: Yeah, well, it was a lot of fun.

JAKE: I just can’t even believe it, I mean you guys have been good this season but that was incredible. It’s great to see you for real again, you know? It’s not the same on the TV. Thanks man. Thanks.

FORD: No problem little man. You deserve it. And I will be god-damned if we ain’t gonna show you a good time tonight son! There is *cause* for celebration.

JAKE: Awwww fuck dude.

FORD: How’s mom? She doin’ alright?

JAKE: Yeah, you know, she wouldn’t let me out of the house on Sundays ’cept for when we go to church, says I lost my real father so she ain’t gonna let me lose the heavenly father too.

FORD: Yeah, I remember that. Can't hurt none, though.

JAKE: If it helps.

FORD: It might.

JAKE: Yeah, well, thank god it's over, at least.

FORD: You know it dude, and it is gonna be the best time you ever had dude. Long as you work hard.

JAKE: I know I know.

FORD: Well aaaaaallllriiight! Ok hold on just a sec now.

ALRIGHT BOYS LISTEN UP LISTEN UP LISTEN UP!!!!

*The players quiet down, form a kind of half circle around JAKE, with FORD standing right behind and to the side of him. Silence.*

FORD: . . . Praise Jesus

BUFFALO BILLS: Praise Jesus.

*The BILLS cross themselves and kneel quietly and respectfully.*

FORD: Tom, do you wanna say a few words?

TOM: Of course, boss. Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name. We wish to thank you for the glorious vengeance that in your divine wisdom you saw fit to rain down upon the Oakland Raiders. We thank you, O Lord for having blessed us today with three touchdowns, 2 field goals, 22 completions, 341 yards gained, 207 passing yards, two interceptions, 3 sacks and 5 third down conversions. The light of your mercy clearly shone upon us today, Lord, just as the dark shadow of your furious scorn fell upon the wretched Oakland Raiders. And, Jesus, I just want to thank you on a personal level for the lovely fall weather this afternoon, I think we all worried that winter might be coming early this year, what with it being so cold last weekend and all through practice and, well, well I think we all really appreciated it. I mean, it's nothing compared to the vengeance, but it sure was nice of ya. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost may we say:

BUFFALO BILLS: Amen.

FORD: Anybody else care to say anything?

*Silence.*

BRUNO: GO BILLS!!!!

BUFFALO BILLS: *GO BILLS!!!!*

*The Bills explode in cheering and merriment. CHUCK picks up a cooler of Gatorade, runs behind FORD and dumps it over his head. THE BILLS go nuts, pounding on the lockers jumping, they chant FORD, FORD, FORD, FORD, FORD—the sound is gulping and guttural, it sounds like seals.*

FORD: Fellas fellas FELLAS PLEASE!!! Thank you, boys, but you know, and I know, that we play as a team. And that I couldn't have just spent two and a half hours throwing laser guided heat seeking football rockets without each and every one of you.

BILLS: YEA!

FORD: Now boys there's somebody I'd like you to meet. (*He moves Jake forward into the circle*) Gentlemen this here is my younger brother Jake.

BILLS: (*Enthusiastic and together*) HI JAKE!

FORD: Gentlemen, my brother and I here have cause for celebration besides our magnificent destruction of the Oakland Raiders. Young Jake here . . . has just been made second string quarterback for the goddamn motherfucking University of Texas Longhorns!

*There is a loud chorus, half cheering, half booing. The BILLS are standing around JAKE staring at him intently. FORD takes JAKE aside. He has become much more intense and animated, but he is deadly serious, as are the rest of the BILLS. The atmosphere becomes religious.*

FORD: All right now Jake, enough fooling around. You gotta get serious now because you're in the big leagues now bro and when you hit the big leagues that means you *might* be goin' to the show.



And trust me brother there ain't nothing better than the show.

BILLS: I LIVE FOR THE SHOW!

FORD: GODDAMNIT Football is the best fuckin' sport god ever gave America.

BILLS: AMERICA!

FORD: So you gotta have respect for your self, respect for the turf, respect for tradition, and most of all respect for the football.

BILLS: RESPECT THE FOOTBALL!

FORD: Now Jake, respectin' the football means you gotta make sacrifice habitually *to* the football which means you *must have* rituals, traditions, superstitions, keepsakes and idols in honor of the All-Powerful Football Gods. Now Jake, you answer me one question and you answer me in my face. Are you not making sacrifices to the football like I told ya? I know you think you're hot shit but goddamnit if I wasn't better than you and for one reason: I respect the Football.

BILLS: RESPECT THE FOOTBALL!

JAKE: Well . . . I—uh . . . I always lace my shoes up really slow, and I, uh, I hit my helmet three times before I run onto the field . . . and I always have breakfast at Eddie's on game days.

FORD: Jake that is nowhere *near* adequate to stave off the terrible fury of the All-Powerful Football Gods. Jake this here is Eric Hargrove. Eric respects the Football. Eric?

ERIC: Jake, every single Bill eats a carefully measured combination of Honey Nut Cheerios, Raisin Bran, and the individual marshmallows from Lucky Charms (with the exception of rainbows) immediately before every regular season game, the same exact thing that Joe Namath ate before he won the third Superbowl. We don't do it because it's particularly nutritious, because it's not, we do it because it has been passed on to a select few for decades, and some in the organization feel it may once again bring glory to the sad, sad, city of Buffalo.

FORD: That's enough Eric. Jake we all have particular things that we eat before the obligatory Holy Cereal of Namath.

BILLS: (*Various*)  
Deep Fried Cheese  
Cat meat balls

Chunky's Campbell Soup like Mom used to make  
Mutton  
A bottle of syrup  
Roast Pheasant  
Elio's Frozen Pizza  
A Ham Hock

FORD: Exactly, and we all have particular routines that we go through before the game and it's all very tedious to be totally honest but what's *most* important are the Idols we keep, our Lucky Charms. *That's* the fun part. Jake this is DeSean Williams. DeSean respects the Football. DeSean?

DESEAN: Jake, I want to show you something (*Removes from his locker.*) I've always loved keeping rabbits feet since I was a kid (*Holds up a large key ring covered in brightly colored rabbits feet.*) I had this since my high school days, but this is what I really treasure. Jake, this is the foot of a raccoon that I killed while I was driving home from my signing ceremony. I realized that the All-Powerful Football Gods had demanded the raccoon as a sacrifice, so I cut off its foot and I've treasured it ever since.

JAKE: Oh god . . . that smells . . . *horrible.*

DESEAN: Well it *is* a largely decayed rodent foot, so that's kinda to be expected.

FORD: Jake, this is Brian Holcomb. Brian respects the Football. Brian?

BRIAN: (*He has long hair and a huge beard*) Jake, I haven't shaved or washed my hair in two months. I don't allow myself to shave or wash my hair *at all* during regular season play, so that I won't wash out the football. Also I only get a haircut once a year on June 11, Joe Montana's birthday.

JAKE: That's pretty . . . gross . . .

FORD: (*Hits JAKE on the back of the head*) Learn some JAKE manners, damnit! Jake, this is Bruno Guskiewicz. Bruno respects the Football. Bruno?

BRUNO: Jake, this is a jockstrap.

JAKE: (*Gasping for breath, eyes watering at the smell of the jock*).  
Oh my god...

BRUNO: When I was 16 years old my high school team beat Elmview

High by 22 points at homecoming. I had 5 sacks that night. That very same evening, I lost my virginity to a Miss Nancy Vaughan. The whole time, I was wearing this jockstrap. I've worn this jockstrap for every game I've played since then, and I haven't washed it in 12 years. Not once. Commitment.

JAKE: I mean . . . I guess . . . but . . . Jesus . . .

FORD: Jake, everybody here has something deeply personal and highly valuable that gives them the strength to go out and do battle. We are COMMITTED to this shit, Jake. The All-Powerful Football Gods must be appeased! If you wanna make it to the show you're gonna have to do it too. I think it's about time you see what's been giving me good luck all these years, go on over and take a look in my locker, Jake.

JAKE: Um . . . ok . . .

*JAKE walks tentatively up to FORD'S locker. He looks at FORD to make sure it's the right one, who nods in excited approval along with the other BILLS. He opens the door and finds a cardboard box, which he opens. He staggers backwards, wide eyed and unable to breathe, and after a moment shrieks horribly*

FORD: Jake! Stop that!

JAKE: THAT'S . . . A HEAD!!

FORD: Yes.

JAKE: That is a *human* head . . . *IN A BOX!!*

FORD: Yeah, what?!

JAKE: A CARDBOARD BOX!!

FORD: Jake, you need to calm down, man.

JAKE: *FORD THERE IS A DEAD CHICK'S HEAD IN YOUR LOCKER!!!!*

FORD: Jake, mellow.

JAKE: *OH MY GOD!!!! (He begins vomiting violently all over the locker room.)*

BILLS: (*Various*)

Oh for god's sake that is disgusting!

Goddamnit Jake!!

Yo fuck you Jake, ya fuckin' pussy!

Jesus, that smells awful.

*The BILLS keep yelling at JAKE until FORD picks him up by the scruff of the neck, carries him over to a Gatorade cooler, takes the lid off, and submerges JAKE'S head. He dunks him repeatedly and throws him in a pile of towels in the corner. The BILLS move about cleaning up JAKE'S puke.*

FORD: Goddamnit, Jake, you've gotta man the fuck up. This is some simple shit brother. Can't just be yackin' all over the place every time shit gets too real because this shit is *tough*. You're fuckin', acting like you've never seen a severed head before.

JAKE: *I HAVEN'T!!!!*

FORD: Well then suck it up, asshole! Goddamnit you're fuckin' embarrassing me. Yes, that's a head, her name is Victoria, get the fuck over it Jake. I'll cut off a fuckin' head, shit...are you kidding me?

JAKE: Why FORD? WHY?!?!?!?

FORD: OH COME ON NOW REALLY, JAKE?!?!?!? Now you honestly mean to tell me that you've never bought a hooker, killed her, cut her head off, put it in a box, stuffed her body with heroin and smuggled it into Mexico??

JAKE: *NO!!!*

FORD: Of course you haven't, because tryin' to move skag in Mexico's fuckin' retarded Jake, it's a *buyers market*.

JAKE: Oh my god! WHY??? . . .

FORD: WHAT THE FUCK DO YOU MEAN WHY?!? Because it's fucking *exhilarating* that's why! I banged that whore in Cleveland after we first went to the AFC East Division Playoffs, I accidentally choked her to death, sacrifice to the All-Powerful Football Gods, *etcetera*, so I cut her head off and put it in a fuckin' box, WHATS THE BIG DEAL?? We've been playing like fucking monsters ever since, so I DON'T SEE WHAT THE PROBLEM IS.

JAKE: THE PROBLEM IS THAT YOU KILLED THAT LADY AND YOU KEEP HER HEAD IN YOUR LOCKER FOR GOOD LUCK!!!

FORD: Ok Jake, you're clearly not listening to reason. Maybe all this football talk is just too much for ya. You've always been a quitter anyway, so it's not really that big of a deal.

JAKE: Ford, oh my god! FORD. . .

FORD: Jake, I really think you gotta start thinking rationally here, because, from my point of view, I think the WORST thing you can accuse me of is, essentially, a series of victimless crimes.

JAKE: THE VICTIM'S HEAD IS ROTTING IN A SHIPPING BOX!!!

FORD: So?? It's not like there aren't things in here that smell worse!! It's not like it's dangerous. Tom keeps a fuckin' loaded gun in his locker, all the time, safety off. Why? No reason. You think I give a shit? You think anyone here gives a shit?

BILLS: WE DON'T BOSS! (*The BILLS run from the room shouting "HUT HUT HUT!!"*)

FORD: Seriously man, I don't know what's wrong with you. I thought you were gonna be on this shit like white on rice. I had so many hopes for you man. Peyton Manning and Eli Manning. Can you imagine that shit? Those guys make so. . . much. . . *fuckin' . . . MONEY, JAKE!!!* They have a fuckin' kid's book now, did you know that? It's called *Family Huddle*. I'm not even kidding! I WANT that for us man!! I want that for you! But you can't just keep riding my coattails forever man; you have to accept this game as it is or get the fuck out. We're like dogs out there man, everybody. And all you can do in life is try to rip out the other guy's jaw before he gets to your throat, otherwise you're fucked. (*He leans in, with quiet intensity*) So here's what we're gonna do. You are gonna take these pills and quadruple your protein intake cuz you gotta put some fuckin' muscle on your scrawny fuckin' ass. I'm gonna introduce you to my buddy Leroy down at U of T. He's on the medical staff, he's gonna shoot you up twice a week. And you're not gonna bitch about the juice; I don't care if it makes your balls into raisins and your head the size of a fuckin' blimp because your balls are just for fuckin', your skull is for football. Your head belongs to Football, Jake. And come springtime, after the Post-Season, you're comin' back up here with me, and you and I are gonna go out, and we are gonna party

hardcore, and I am not letting you touch a football again until we get you *your very own head*. I'm serious man; I will not see my only brother get wrapped up in some ridiculous pussy shit. You made all the guys sad too. Thanks for nothing. What a shitty day. Goddamnit Jake. Fuck you.

*There is a long silence. FORD sits on the bench looking sad. Slowly, JAKE rises from his pile of towels. He walks over to FORD's Locker. He takes the worn brown cardboard box and puts it on the floor. He kneels by the box, opens it, and lifts the head out with both hands. He looks at the head for a long time. He kisses it on the lips. He looks at it for a long time. He smiles. He takes a large bite out of the head's left cheek.*

JAKE: Ford? Did this used to be a person?

FORD: I'm a warrior, Jake.

I can block that from my mind.

You've got to play with your head.

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**RYAN ALLEN** is a Course Mentor in Language and Communications at Western Governors University and serves as the Creative Writing Editor for *605 Magazine*. He received his PhD in English from the University of South Dakota in 2009. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in the *Platte Valley Review*, *Oregon Literary Review*, *605 Magazine*, *VLP Magazine*, *LEO Magazine* and *Planet Jackson Hole*. Ryan currently lives in Sioux City, Iowa, with his wife.

After a six-year stint on a daily newspaper in his native Greece, **ATHANASIOS ANAGNOSTOU** had a forty-year career in the States as a physician, hematology researcher, and medical school professor. He lives in Newton, Massachusetts, working on a novel based on the life of Samuel G. Howe, a Boston physician, social radical, abolitionist, and husband of Julia Ward Howe, who fought in the Greek War of Independence in the 1820s.

**EDMUND AUGUST**, a member of The Chartreuse Table, has had poems published in *Poetry*, *The Louisville Review*, *smartish pace*, and other journals. His first book of poems, *Moon Dogs* (Wind Publications 2005) placed second at the 2005 Southern Kentucky Book Festival.

**PATTY BOSS** is a San Francisco-based poet and musician. Her work has appeared in *California Quarterly*, *Controlled Burn*, *The Griffin*, *Permafrost* and others. *Parthenon West Review* editor David Holler calls her work, “brave and beautiful.”

**DEANNA BOULARD** recently completed her MFA at the University of Maryland and taught English in the south of France. She lives in Louisville, Kentucky.

**GAYLORD BREWER** is the founding editor of *Poems & Plays*. His most recent books are the poetry collection *The Martini Diet* (Dream Horse) and the novella *Octavius the 1<sup>st</sup>* (Red Hen). He teaches at Middle Tennessee State University and in the low-residency MFA program at Murray State.

**REID BUSH**, a retired teacher who writes poems daily, has been published in many magazines and journals in the U.S. and abroad. Larkspur Press has published a book of his poems, *What You Know*, and Garrison Keillor has read three poems from it on *The Writer's Almanac*.

**DAN CATOMERIS** was born and raised in the Boston area. He currently lives in New York City where he is an undergraduate studying acting at the Experimental Theater Wing at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts.

**SHERRY CHANDLER** is the author of *Dance the Black-Eyed Girl* and *My Will and Testament Is on the Desk*. She has received financial support from the Kentucky Arts Council and the Kentucky Foundation for Women. Her work has appeared in many print and online magazines and anthologies, including *Umbrella*, *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*, *poemeleon*, and *Kestrel*. She blogs at <http://www.sherrychandler.com>.

**MARTHA CHRISTINA** has published recently in *Santa Fe Review*, *The Orange Room Review*, *Main Channel Voices*, and the anthology, *Lavanderia—A Mixed Load of Women, Wash and Word* (San Diego City Works Press). She lives in Bristol, Rhode Island.

**DEBRA KANG DEAN** is the author of *Back to Back*, a chapbook of poems, and *News of Home* and *Precipitates*, both published by BOA Editions. Her poems have been featured on *The Writer's Almanac*, *Poetry Daily*, and *Verse Daily*; have appeared in a number of anthologies, including *The Best American Poetry*, *The New American Poets*, and *America! What's My Name?: The "Other" Poets Unfurl the Flag*; and have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *The Florida Review*, *Solo Café*, and *Connotation Press: An Online Artifact*, a new online journal. She is on the faculty of Indiana University's Asian American Studies Program and Spalding University's brief-residency MFA in Writing Program.

**SUE TERRY DRISKELL** has poems published in *The American Voice*, *Arable: a Literary Journal*, *The Greensboro Review*, and *The Louisville Review*. She is the winner of an Al Smith Fellowship from the Kentucky Arts Commission and in 2009 her chapbook, *Drawn Into Someone's Passion*, was published by Finishing Line Press. She lives in Louisville, Kentucky.

**GRAHAM HILLARD** lives in Nashville, Tennessee, where he teaches creative writing at Trevecca Nazarene University. His poems, stories, and essays have appeared widely—most recently in *Regarding Arts and Letters*, *Boxcar Poetry Review*, *Killing the Buddha*, and *The Oxford American*.



**PHILIP HOPKINS'** writing has appeared in *identitytheory* and will appear in *The Seneca Review* this year. His plays have been staged in New York City at Access Theater and elsewhere.

**ERIN KEANE** is the author of two collections of poems, *Death-Defying Acts* and *The Gravity Soundtrack*. She is a journalist in Louisville, Kentucky, where she teaches at Bellarmine University, National University, and directs the InKY Reading Series.

**JOEL LONG'**s book *Winged Insects* won the White Pine Press Poetry Prize. His chapbooks, *Chopin's Preludes* and *Saffron Beneath Every Frost* were published from Elik Press. His poems have appeared in *Interim*, *Isotope*, *Gulf Coast*, *Bitter Oleander*, *Crab Orchard Review*, and many other journals. His poems have been anthologized in *American Poetry: the Next Generation*, *Essential Love*, *Fresh Water*, and *I Go to the Ruined Place: Contemporary Poems in Defense of Global Human Rights*. He has poems forthcoming in *Quarterly West* and *The Pinch*. He received the Mayor's Artist Award for Literary Arts at the Utah Arts Festival and the Writers Advocate Award from Writers at Work.

**ZACHARY MARTIN'**s fiction, nonfiction, and humor have appeared in *Fourth Genre*, *Lumina*, *Washington Square*, *Zaum*, *The Southeast Review*, and other journals. He teaches at the College of Staten Island and lives in Brooklyn.

**JOYCE McDONALD** is the author of several novels for young adults, most notably *Swallowing Stones*, an American Library Association Top Ten Best Book for Young Adults and *Booklist's* 100 Best of the Best 1966–2003, and *Shades of Simon Gray*, an Edgar Allen Poe Award Nominee. She taught creative writing at Drew University for ten years and currently teaches in Spalding University's brief-residency MFA in Writing Program.

**KAREN SALTER McELMURRAY** teaches at George College and State University and is creative nonfiction editor for *Arts and Letters*. She is the author of the novels *Strange Birds in the Tree of Heaven* and *The Motel of the Stars*, as well as the memoir *Surrendered Child*. She lives in Maryland.

**ANDREW NAJBERG** teaches for the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. His chapbook of poems, *Easy to Lose*, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2007, and his work has appeared in various journals and anthologies including *New Millennium Review*, *Bat City Review* and a forthcoming issue of *Artful Dodge*.

**BETH NEWBERRY** earned her MFA in Writing from Spalding University. Her creative nonfiction and journalism have appeared in *Writing by Ear: An Anthology of Writings about Music*, *Sojourners* magazine, *Still: the Journal of Appalachian Literature*, *Velocity Weekly*, *Louisville* magazine, *Now & Then*, and *Pluck! the Journal of Affrilachian Arts and Culture*, where she served as managing editor. Previously, she assisted editor Robert Atwan with research on the anthology, *Best American Essays 2008*. This year, she received a grant from the Kentucky Foundation for Women to support her work on a collection of essays based on oral histories.

**DAN O'BRIEN**'s poems have appeared recently in *MARGIE*, *32 Poems*, *Crab Orchard Review*, and *Greensboro Review*. His play *The Cherry Sisters Revisited* premiered at the 2010 Humana Festival of New American Plays at Actors Theatre of Louisville.

**PAT OWEN** is a former teacher and legal publisher who is currently pursuing an MFA in poetry at Spalding University. She has studied with Mark Doty, Stephen Dunn, and Jane Hirshfield and has participated in a number of poetry workshops including the Palm Beach Poetry Festival and Aspen Summer Words. She was a finalist in the *Chautauqua Literary Journal* contest in 2008.

**JACKIE WHITE ROGERS**'s nonfiction has been published in such magazines as *Now and Then*, *Southern Kentucky Family*, and *Wind*. Her award-winning fiction has appeared in a collection of writings from emerging Kentucky writers. She lives in Science Hill, Kentucky.

An Okie by birth, **JEFF SIMPSON** has served as poetry editor for *The Oklahoma Review* and as an editorial assistant for *The Cimarron Review*. In 2008, he was selected as a finalist for the Pablo Neruda Prize in Poetry. His poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming *Copper Nickel*, *The Pinch*, *Harpur Palate*, *H\_NGM\_N*, and various other journals. Visit him at [www.jeffsimpson.org](http://www.jeffsimpson.org).

**BARBARA BUCKMAN STRASKO** is the first Poet Laureate of Lancaster County. She is the 2009 River of Words Teacher of the Year. Her poems have appeared in: *The Best New Poets of 2006*, *Rhino*, *Nimrod*, *Brilliant Corners*, and *Ninth Letter*. Her chapbook *On the Edge of a Delicate Day* was published by Pudding House Press in 2008.

**SAMANTHA THORNHILL** teaches poetry at the Juilliard School in New York City. She is also writer in residence at the Bronx Academy of Letters. Her poem turned picture book *Little Odetta* is forthcoming from Scholastic. Her website is <http://samanthaspeaks.com>.

**LISA VERIGIN**'s poems have previously appeared in *Poet Lore*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Quarterly West*, *Court Green*, *Bloom*, and other literary journals—most recently, *Chiron Review*, *Talking River* and *Chickenpinata*. She has work forthcoming in *Green Hills Literary Lantern* and has also published articles on poetic craft in *The Writer*. She currently works in freelance communications, specializing in holistic health and wellness topics.

**THOMAS RAMEY WATSON** is an affiliate faculty member of Regis University's College of Professional Studies in Denver, Colorado. He is the author of an acclaimed book on Milton, *Perversions, Originals, and Redemptions in Paradise Lost* (University Press of America 2007). He is a published author of scholarly articles, poetry, fiction, and numerous articles about counseling and coaching. His novel *Reading the Signs: A Paranormal Love Story* and a three-book, creative nonfiction series are in search of a literary agent.

The  
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## Clara Fannjiang

### SEASONAL PERMANENCE

There is only starlight left. There is only starlight left  
where we used to sit, squander, twirl with our  
silver mapping pens, grimace and squawk in the paltry heels  
the mothers left us. There were the lunchtimes  
when we botanized, scraping out roses from twisted numbers,  
the moon in shy hiding while we sang, juicing lemons,

dicing soft oranges into school bags. The cry of the  
fumbled paramount churning, flying, but only gloved irritations  
in our virgin ears, oh so white, so pearly and well-pulled  
like the taffy uncle austria would bring  
every first friday: sickly purple, chartreuse and lemons,  
starfish, coral, suckling red, marred not

by his monstrous beard nor by the mutual father, the glinting  
streetlights touching both our eyelids. *Much like starlight*,  
you would whisper gravely, eyes wide, timorous and golden.  
You were soft back then. You were soft back then  
when the streets holding our waxing homes were one  
and the same, immaculate in the net of the infant mind,

blushing in hydrangeas, milked and seeded,  
seven-fold in artlessness. We taught each other how to fall  
when the farthest winds came, breaking only to salt pillars,  
tangible in scrutiny, crimping cranes and silver bells  
out of newspapers, stones in steel tea, chiming. Crutches  
in doubled hands, polyrhythms opening stitches:

you danced to everything, everything and anything, as much  
as the nesting mockingbirds in the blue eaves would ask  
of you—the sane chirp, a broken samba; the salty lowing, a suffering  
waltz;  
the warble, a finite step within the cupping pool, sheared of yellow-  
ing dignity

and sulfured age, moldy adages, the milk of magnesia churning  
in autumnal patterns, spilling fast between us.

We were as the leaves. We were as the leaves  
bright and sudden on the white hills, quilted in wintry down  
and rheumatic papers riddled in quotas, stains,  
panicked exponents and crippling sawdust from the brethren  
table, the crude glyphs spelling *omega, omega,*  
*omega,* sketches of the last frail crease,

misconstrued. I left for the numbers, you embracing  
the tepid scores of an empty pillowcase, the familiarity  
of a well-worn bruise, the grandfather skeleton  
in the stained olive armchair. The swell on the horizon,  
mistaken time and time again for the dormant savior, the magic flute,  
risen dust, dismembered *love* upon the Spanish heath

written and crowned within the smallest years  
of thoughts on infinity, breaking no ground, slipping no  
screen. Limb by limb you fell into volumes, chagrined pages  
upon pages of leftover music, pounds of white linen notes  
in fine-tuned g-moll where nomads and fingers could touch,  
curl, lament in greatest wingspans, harness

the lone cradle of thought never again to be reached, strummed, or  
opened  
in the union of footsteps and gray-pink april years. There was  
something  
left to be said and everything left to be done, or to have been,  
the wild chaff spinning, a crescendo falling to the last void,  
the fulfilled brink. We had given by oath and the unsaid words  
took viciously without reminder,

without orphaned grace, seething brightly, no frog to augur  
the sundering rains. The world was a cube,  
boxed in estranged vertices, the letters  
left spelt in two directions. *There are still stars,*  
you would say gravely, eyes wide. Timorous and golden.  
There is still starlight. There is still starlight.

## Clara Fannjiang

### LISTENINGS

primal rhymes carry much symmetry  
to a shameless house. they bounce  
from broken streetlights to *there*, then  
*here*, then *there* and *back again*,

picking up momentum and  
cyan expressions. there are the voices  
of the foxgloves in the dark, there is the  
wind that carries away the dark geese

that were goslings yester-spring. is there nothing  
to be grateful for anymore? why do the sons  
wander like sheep, pawing at foreign alcohols  
and gibbering of gadgets

from japan and neverland? fortune comes  
in little round packets  
of continuum, a very obscure mathematician  
from pingtung, taiwan once said; thus,

the touch of god comes  
within every man's reach, just as the  
blighted perceivers have filled  
their diaries with red wax

and dusty cherubs have once again  
made their home on the humble porch. the verities  
sing fervently, softly, blindly to their children:  
here is the faithful sun,

spinning yellow and blue



into further spectrums. the small cracked cup  
upon the windowsill, dug up from the depths  
of the pink portrait drawer. here is the golden tea

in the cup, and—look up—  
here is the small garden  
simmering in smokeless greens and  
purples melting like butter,

unseen only  
by the sleepless eye, the blighted  
perceiver, the wretched son who turned  
and walked his own way.

## Emma V. Ginader

### NERD LOVE

I propose that  
We become Mulder and Scully

Each night when I get  
Home from our rendezvous  
I pine to compile a million blog posts  
On how the candles refract off your glasses

In the Mid-Atlantic DC spring  
It often rains but we trek across The National Mall  
For the sole purpose of visiting  
The Folgers Shakespeare Library hand in hand with you

Mozart is your favorite composer  
Mine happens to be Handel  
But that is perfectly okay  
We can still discuss their influence on pop culture

One-liners about how simply Buffy  
Could kick the Halliwells' butt  
Always coerces a chuckle out of me  
But never as much as the jokes about Macintoshes

Relaxing in your apartment is  
Always best in the evenings  
When we sink into your couch  
And view repeats of our favorite *Star Trek* episodes

Trips to Mac stores, museums,  
Cherry Blossom Festivals, Congressional hearings,  
Are all incomplete without  
My converses and your cros shoes side by side

When aliens visit Earth  
Only you can come with me to greet them

## Emma V. Ginader

### OCEANSIDE

Summertime sky & shore  
In the pupil of my eye.

Girls wear bright  
Outfits sitting  
Next to boys with tans and  
The salt of the tides in their hair.

Girls dance  
As boys splash  
In the sea.  
Their heads under the horizon.

Girls watch the rain blackening the sand  
While boys kiss  
Their white necks,  
Droplets falling on their skin.

Summertime.

**Analine Aguayo**

**OH, THE MANY THINGS TO DO**

Travel outside the continent,  
Because life's got to take a plane somewhere,  
Take that plane, and jump out of it;  
Skydiving—you have to feel that air around you like never before.

See the Blue Man Group,  
They're so amazingly great.  
Paint a picture of a not so "Starry Night,"  
I mean I'm no Van Gogh.

Write a story of my life  
Even if no one reads it.  
Build a family to leave stuff behind,  
Not only a name but a legacy.

Love and be as happy as can be,  
Hold no grudges towards others,  
Learn what there is to learn,  
And fulfill this list.

## **Kayleigh Birch**

### **MY LIFE**

I am like a pencil being used  
Now new and strong  
But as the years pass  
My eraser starts to crumble  
and turn black  
I start to break more often  
and get scratched up  
As I slowly get shorter and shorter  
until I am gone

**Michael Dohmann**

## **THE POWER OF WORDS**

It's the words that are written, and the words that we read  
That give us the meaning to go on and the strength that we need  
To climb higher mountains and to take greater leaps  
They teach us to run without moving our feet  
We take simple words, and yet bring them to life  
Words carry treasures, and they can cut like a knife  
They tell us a story of a man 10,000 miles away  
Still we're somehow connected in some uncertain way

Words solve disputes, and break relations in two  
Words paint the mysterious night sky all shades of blue  
And without lifting a finger we transcend the earth  
We experience both life and death, and the cycle of rebirth  
And through one man's words he can channel a million souls  
That are all somehow connected by the things they've been told  
Words provoke thought about the essence of being  
And show us new things which we didn't plan on seeing

They stay with us forever, some left unsaid  
And they still carry weight long after we're dead  
They bring life to the lifeless, and bring meaning to silence  
They bring thought and justice to meaningless violence  
They awaken the sleeping, they accompany isolation  
They light a dark room, and give birth to a nation  
But above everything else, they empower us all  
They give us the power to stand, and the comfort to fall

## Adriana van Manen

### PENELOPE'S KNOWING

i can feel my husband's journey  
in my hands. their trembling  
is his anxiety, their cramp his collapse,  
their tapered elegance his tuned  
eloquent speech, their veins his  
winding route, fanning and flowering  
out.

absence maps my body.  
my blood pulses with missing, it carries  
and cries his name: odysseus  
odysseus odysseus. but deficiency  
has made the heart i held him with  
evolve. the place in it for love  
is a vestigial structure now, rejecting  
the need for suitors, tensing my body  
against them. my hands shake,  
my lips refuse to part for them.

at night,  
when my palms cannot contain  
their sorrow any longer, i weave.  
he is the warp, "that which is thrown across,"  
and i the transverse threads. i intersect  
our fates in his funeral shroud.  
each movement of my hands sweats  
sadness into the strands of fabric. then  
i undo what i have done, unravel  
and deny my suspicions of his death.  
my hands will only rest when he is home.

## Elizabeth Rosenbaum

### DREAMS

Cerulean memory wisps  
That crinkle and twinkle merrily  
And whisper the romance of a long-lost thought  
The hypnotizing waltz of a fairy  
Lithe, shining.  
Translucent, porcelain, memory curls  
Luminescent in their ambiguity  
They twirl like smoke  
Tantalizing and utterly motivating.  
I beg you not to slip away  
Again.



## Elizabeth Rosenbaum

### GONE

The inky air of nightfall  
coats the taciturn trees  
and the dead wood beneath them  
rots slowly into dust.  
As the moon abandons his post  
the stars flee with turned faces.  
It is the last night of earth  
and the sky mourns its fallen child.  
Even the wind, who whispers her condolences  
does not sweep upon the cold and silent ground  
for it is no longer earth.  
It is simply gone.

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**ANALINE AGUAYO** is sixteen years old. She was born and raised in a Mexican household in southern California. She loves the simple things in life and having fun. She currently attends John Burroughs High School in Burbank, California, and aspires to live, love, and learn. She also loves to smile, laugh, bike ride, and listen to music. Her favorite books include *The Outsiders* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

**KAYLEIGH BIRCH** is a fifth grade student at Coeur d' Alene Elementary School in Venice, California. Kayleigh was born in Toronto, Ontario, and moved to Los Angeles at the age of two with her parents. Kayleigh is an avid reader and enjoys creative writing. She plays center on her basketball team, holds a blue belt in Tae-Kwon-Do, and has a pretty comical outlook on life.

**MICHAEL DOHMANN** is a sophomore at Suffern High School in Suffern, New York. He is a track and field as well as cross-country athlete. He is very passionate about his sport. Michael also loves reading and writing. His favorite authors are Paulo Coelho and Hermann Hesse. Writing poetry is his favorite form of self-expression and he has been writing poetry since he was a young child. He aspires to become a well-known author when he becomes an adult, so that his ever-changing perspective on the world can be shared with others.

**CLARA FANNJIANG**, a sophomore in high school, has long had an interest in contemporary poetry despite her academic emphases on chemistry and math. Her poetry has appeared in *The Apprentice Writer* and *Polyphony H.S.* and has been recognized in the Int'l Ipswich Poetry Feasts and Press 53 Open Awards. Other interests include classical piano and competitive speech and debate.

**EMMA V. GINADER** is a resident of Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania. She is currently a junior at Central Columbia High School. She participates in forensics, model UN, book club, and the yearbook, *The Centaur*. When she is not busy with school, she enjoys reading and writing. She is currently working with the local Friends on their third annual poetry seminar, which she developed.

**ELIZABETH ROSENBAUM** is in tenth grade at the Holton-Arms School in Bethesda, Maryland. She has attended various summer programs including the Summer Institute for the Gifted at Princeton University and the Education Program for Gifted Youth at Stanford University. There, she studied creative writing, poetry, and vocabulary. Her work has been published in Holton-Arms' newspaper and literary magazine. She hopes to become an author or editor.

**ADRIANA VAN MANEN** is fifteen years old and currently attends Princeton Day School in Princeton, New Jersey. Aside from writing she enjoys traveling, eating frozen raspberries, and taking photos. Previously Adriana's work has been published by *Teen Ink*. This summer she is excited to attend St. Andrews University for their summer writing program.





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**Fiction**

Julie Brickman  
Louella Bryant  
K. L. Cook  
Philip F. Deaver  
Kirby Gann  
Rachel Harper  
Roy Hoffman  
Silas House  
Robin Lippincott  
Jody Lisberger  
Nancy McCabe  
Eleanor Lincoln Morse  
Sena Jeter Naslund  
Neela Vaswani  
Mary Yukari Waters  
Crystal Wilkinson

**Poetry**

Debra Kang Dean  
Philip F. Deaver  
Kathleen Driskell  
Maureen Morehead  
Greg Pape  
Molly Peacock  
Jeanie Thompson

**Creative Nonfiction**

Dianne Aprile  
Louella Bryant  
Robert Finch  
Charles Gaines  
Richard Goodman  
Roy Hoffman  
Nancy McCabe  
Cathleen Medwick  
Elaine Neil Orr  
Molly Peacock  
Luke Wallin

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cont.***

**Writing for Children and Young Adults**

Susan Campbell Bartoletti

Louella Bryant

Joyce McDonald

Luke Wallin

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### Program Director

Sena Jeter Naslund,  
author of *Ahab's Wife*, *Four Spirits*,  
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