

The
Louisville
Review

Volume 76
Fall 2014

THE LOUISVILLE REVIEW

Editor	Sena Jeter Naslund
Guest Faculty Editors	Leslie Daniels, Maureen Morehead, Charlie Schulman
Guest Editors	Jason Howard, Betsy Woods
Managing Editor	Karen J. Mann
Associate Editor	Kathleen Driskell
Assistant Managing Editor	Ellyn Lichvar
Student Assistant Editors	Farah Bagharib-Kaltz, Heath Bowen, Brittany Bryant, Ashley Cook, Shawna Downes, Jessica Evans, Peter Field, Karyl Anne Geary, Anna Haynes, Journey McAndrews, Mackenzie Miller, Michael Premo, Samantha Vakiener

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 Submissions of previously unpublished manuscripts are invited.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. 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 round. Simultaneous submissions accepted. Payment is in copies. Email address: louisvillereview@spalding.edu. Children/teen (K-12) poetry and fiction must be accompanied by parental permission to publish if accepted. Reply time is up to 6 months.

This issue: \$8 ppd

Sample copy: \$5 ppd

Subscriptions: One year, \$14; two years, \$27; three years, \$40

Student subscription: One year, \$12; two years, \$20

Foreign subscribers, please add \$4/year for shipping.

The text and the cover printed in the United States. Cover photo, *Pueblo Bonito at Chaco Canyon, New Mexico*, by Gerald Plain. Cover design by Jonathan Weinert.

TLR gratefully acknowledges the support of the low-residency Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program, Spalding University, 851 S. Fourth St., Louisville, KY 40203. Email mfa@spalding.edu for information about the MFA in Writing Program.

© 2014 by The Louisville Review Corporation. All rights revert to authors.

EDITOR'S NOTE

A book review section is now a feature of *The Louisville Review*, starting with this fall 2014 issue! I hope you will enjoy Erin Keane's reviews of *Come Landfall* (University of Alabama Press), a novel written by Spalding low-residency MFA in Writing faculty member Roy Hoffman, and *The Woman of La Mancha* (Fleur-de-Lis Press), a novel by Karen J. Mann, administrative director and co-founder of the Spalding low-residency MFA in Writing.

Since founding *TLR* in 1976, I have never included book reviews as I wanted to save all possible space for original fiction and poetry, but the magazine has evolved. In 1979, *TLR* added The Children's Corner. In more recent years, following the founding of the Spalding low-residency Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program in 2001, *TLR* began regularly publishing work in all the areas offered in our writing curriculum—fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, writing for children, screenwriting and playwriting. Unfortunately, in those same years, the number of newspapers and journals that publish book reviews has drastically decreased. When Louisville's local newspaper, *The Courier-Journal*, once the publisher of a weekly two-page spread on books, authors, and literary events, ceased publishing book reviews, we decided in our own small way to commence publishing book reviews; that begins with this issue of *TLR*.

Fortunately, one of our Spalding MFA graduates, Erin Keane, has turned her talent not only to writing original poetry but also to writing balanced and insightful reviews. We have begun the publication of book reviews to address a gap in the practice of book reviewing but also, specifically, from this point on, to promote the work of our Spalding MFA faculty and staff; we're also intending in the future to provide some online space for reviews of new books and scripts by our splendidly successful alums and students.

Here are the various guest editors for this ground-breaking issue of *TLR*, my sincere thanks to each and all of them:

LESLIE DANIELS' first novel, *Cleaning Nabokov's House*, was published by Simon & Schuster, and in translation in four languages. She's worked as a literary agent, fiction editor of *Green Mountains Review* and as artistic advisor to Ithaca's Spring Writes literary festival. Leslie Daniels teaches with Spalding University's MFA in Writing program.

JASON HOWARD is the author of *A Few Honest Words: The Kentucky Roots of Popular Music*, co-author of *Something's Rising: Appalachians Fighting Mountain-top Removal*, and editor of the forthcoming literary anthology *The Women We Love*. His work has been widely anthologized, and his essays, features, reviews and commentary have appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Nation*, *The Louisville Review*, *Sojourners*, *Paste*, and on NPR. A finalist for the 2013 Kentucky

Literary Award, he received the 2013 Al Smith Individual Artist Fellowship in Creative Nonfiction from the Kentucky Arts Council.

ERIN KEANE is the author of three collections of poetry. The latest, *Demolition of the Promised Land*, was published by Typecast Publishing in 2014. A recent fellow in the National Critics Institute at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, Keane lives in Louisville, where she works as arts reporter and critic for WFPL, Louisville's NPR news station.

MAUREEN MOREHEAD has published five books of poetry, the most recent *Late August Blues, the Daylily Poems* (Larkspur Press). She is currently a faculty member of Spalding University's low-residency MFA in Writing Program and served as 2011/2012 Kentucky Poet Laureate. She is involved in how reading and writing poetry contributes to humanistic studies of medical students as part of the Narrative Medicine initiative.

CHARLIE SCHULMAN is a playwright, screenwriter and theater producer. His musical *The Goldstein Variations* will be seen Off-Broadway in 2015. For more info: www.theschulberts.com

BETSY WOODS is weekly columnist and feature writer with *The Times Picayune* and teaches writing in New Orleans schools. She is a proud member of onepotatoten.blogspot.com, a collective of ten children's writers and illustrators. Her work has appeared in *The Louisville Review*, *The New Orleans Review*, *Sophisticated Woman*, *Alive Now*, *The Literary Trunk*, and *Citizens Together Magazine*.

—Sena Jeter Naslund, Editor

TABLE OF CONTENTS

POETRY

- Polly Buckingham *The Knocking* 9
Adam Day *The Metro-North, Beacon–Manhattan* 10
Clay Graham *Obtuse Love* 14
Patricia Gray *Bee Weight* 17
Frank Guan *Rainbow Trust* 18
Charles Baudelaire *La Géante* 20
translated by Frank Guan ("The Giantess") 21
Ray Keifetz *Because Our Story Was Too Vast* 22
Joel Long *Live at the Sip and Dip* 23
Ann Lynn *Anthology* 25
Peter Makuck *Now* 26
Betsy Martin *After Dinner* 27
Lesléa Newman *My Mother Is* 28
Richard Newman *Necromancy Spell* 29
Jeremy Dae Paden *The Capitan Will Land in Paradise* 31
John Repp *Tijuana Foot Bridge* 32
Rochelle Jewel Shapiro *What She Was Left With* 33
They Were Damsons 34
David Starkey *Christ Among the Doctors* 35
Joshua Michael Stewart *Two Teenage Boys at a Picnic Table* 36
Eugenie Juliet Theall *Ramon* 37
Maryfrances Wagner *Knots* 38
Mark Lee Webb *Chupacabra of Calabasas* 39
Hueneme 41
Paul Willis *In the Parking Lot* 42
Marian Willmott *Pink* 44
Jeff Worley *In This Light* 45
Pissing from the Front Porch of My Cabin 46

FICTION

- Neil Shepard *Stone Giant* 47
[Wigged Out] 48
Molly Giles *Ram And Dam* 49
J. Robert Lennon *Marriage (Mystery)* 51
Marriage (Dogs) 52

	<i>Marriage (Game)</i>	54
	<i>Marriage (Marriage)</i>	55
Jill Allyn Rosser	<i>One Confusion</i>	56
Geoff Dennis	<i>Haunt</i>	59
Cynthia Robinson	<i>Back to School</i>	62
Paul Cody	<i>Now Here</i>	
Flora K. Schildknecht	<i>A Bad and Sinful Girl</i>	70

NONFICTION

Susan Tekulve	<i>Following the Slow Black River</i>	79
Sonja Livingston	<i>Rosalie, from the Philippines</i>	90
Stephanie Barton	<i>The Art of Giving</i>	92
Fenton Johnson	<i>Light in August</i>	99
Donna McClanahan Crow	<i>Red Moon Rising</i>	101
Thelma G. Wyland	<i>The Circle Opens</i>	107

DRAMA

Grace Song	<i>Friday Night</i>	115
Nivi R. Engineer	<i>The Saviors of Scarborough: A Play in One Act</i>	119

REVIEWS

Erin Keane	<i>The Woman of La Mancha</i> by Karen Mann	130
	<i>Come Landfall</i> by Roy Hoffman	132

Notes on Contributors	134
-----------------------	-----

THE CHILDREN'S CORNER

Emily Zhang	<i>Daily Hazards</i>	142
	<i>Afflatus</i>	143
	<i>Something Sacred</i>	144
Kian Vilhauer	<i>The Caterpillar</i>	145
Daniel Kwiatkowski	<i>Expecting Rain</i>	147

Notes on Contributors to The Children's Corner	148
--	-----

Polly Buckingham

THE KNOCKING

I pull you from fog,
my hands lost

in your borders. Fog
inhabits me
like a knocking I won't answer.

I pull you out of a well,
and my hands
turn black and boundary-less.

The knocking too
has no end. It is a circle

with no center,
art without a lie.

I will not answer.

Adam Day

THE METRO-NORTH, BEACON-MANHATTAN

We're going somewhere—
almost.

~

My father designed
the house

I grew up in. He simply
never built it. The skipping

footsteps
of the record's end.

~

He wanted things
he had never seen.

~

I don't really know
how long twenty minutes is.

~

I don't care about
your bad day. Don't

bring that here.

~

She doesn't know
you know. The scalp

of her bits crowned
with another man's balls.

~

There's a microphone
picking every word up

and it shuts itself off
when it's sure

that's its heard enough.

~

I used to pull more tail
than a slow kid

at a petting zoo. What
is life without courtship?

~

I've looked
at our ceiling fan

with longing before, but
today's the first time

I actually wondered
if it could bare my weight,

which is pretty
funny, actually.

~

I sometimes
wonder if I

ever came back
from that voyage.

~

Are you all right? Yes,
I'm all right. Well, that's

all right then isn't it?

~

As for living, our servants
can do that for us.

~

If not good
then careful.

~

Who put the chinamen
in my office? Finally,

someone'll be working
in there.

~

The printer apologized
for two weeks, day

and night. Whenever
a box of paper ran

out the computer
displayed the number

of times it had apologized.

~
And at night, surprising
developments—faucets

run, the carpet stands
up. Fans unwind

adequate air
and floors whine.

Clay Graham

OBTUSE LOVE

They reminisce, they reminisce.

Yes.

Hoping such, at the least.

Yes.

Such a beautiful word.

Mountains of adulation, adoration, exaltation all to a particular sense of the English
symbol, Yes.

Yes.

I reminisce.

I reminisce over all the yes.

I green it. The yellow-green of life,
the sun of all colors.

That is the feel of my idol.

The pure Yes.

The ideal Affirmation.

Roger that.

All Yesmen standing by.

Wait! No No No!

Look at this, this that you've made me excruciate negation! Gah!

This is no time for dialectic.

This is my 18th century moment.

This is my white linen, Yes.

This is my mathematical invention.

Give me the Enlightenment and I will give you YES.

Undisclosed darkness.

I reminisce.

Yes, it's true.

It's not what it was. No.

Now is the time for decay. Decadence.

Yes does not partake in Reminisce.

Yes says No so that it might be YES.

But lo, am I to understand the master?
A servant boy to the mystery of God?
My Monolithic Real.

Our Yes.

See here:
My flatulence,
My microwaved bean bowl,
My brewing shit storm,
My academic incompetence,
My reclusion and judgment,
My hatred and resentment,
My revulsion of the world,
Its populous of Bullshit, Inauthentic Preachers.
My weary heart,
My Midwestern Walmart.

See it?

But look! There beyond,
If you can peer around the heap of shit . . .
The smell makes for thick air . . .
Can you see it?
Off in the distance is *Yes*.

It waves to us.
It beckons us onward.
Yes.
To join in.
Yes.

But oh, Yes, how can I?
Knowing what stands between?
Where would my solace stand?
If I journey, will you appear closer?

I'm frightened (*rightfully so, I'd say*) I'll only find more shit,
Just an ocean.¹
And I must shit myself too.
Yes.
I must "play the game."
You know it all too well.
There's no other way to be a Yes!

Surely you don't expect me to believe you were born in some sort of Yesbubble.
If you think this of yourself, allow me to disabuse you of this notion.
You can't smell the shit anymore.
You've been wallowing in it for decades
Prosaic poetry,
Postmodern potion.

Only once a man has given up the notion of producing anything other than shit,
sweat, and semen is he able to say Yes.

It's a long road to ruin, but we haven't faltered yet.
Yes.
Bring it on.

¹. Just an aside, but do you remember that moment in the film *Titanic*, when the camera zooms way out for an extreme long shot? The ship is already fucked, and all that you, as the viewer, can hear is the faint crackle of the flare exploding in the vastness. That's the moment.

Patricia Gray

BEE WEIGHT

Once, in Szechwan Province,
pear trees bore so plenteously
that insects buzzed round
in drunken bliss and birds
swooped in staggering loops
as extra pears fell, fermenting
in an ecstasy of rot.

But that time is gone.
Honeybee hives are deserted,
pollen left untouched, pear honey
unmade, and from this sudden
vanishing, humans have become bees,
inventing a bird feather brush
fastened to a rod and dipped
into pollen to tickle each opulent
blossom like the dry kiss of an old man,
causing the blooms to shudder, and
enough pears to ripen to ship abroad
for fresh pear syrup and wine.

And luckily, in my small field this spring,
honeybees skip from bean flower
to clover, murmuring and wriggling
their pollen-clad legs, quivering
their wings so lightly and quickly
that blossoms tremble and bounce
to the lift of bee weight—
rising for farther sweet regions.

Frank Guan

RAINBOW TRUST

for E.B.

I

Just think of China, then
it all falls into place.
Interested in each and

every, out fading in.

The water that you lost was all connected.
Mosaic of colored salts
where the Atlantic borders on

the desert (does it?)

equals strange growth,
quiet confidence.
New stars where it's warmer

in the green south.

II

Being foreign is
the business of a child,
a gorgeous gray sestina

about the separateness of things

childhood's willful recapitulation,
defined as genius by a friend
abroad. Wherever you are going,

bits of former ocean

float overhead, invisible (not quite!) reminders
of natural circulation,
earth's limited coherence:

all the rest that's yours.

Charles Baudelaire

LA GÉANTE

Du temps que la Nature en sa verve puissante
Concevait chaque jour des enfants monstrueux,
J'eusse aimé vivre auprès d'une jeune géante,
Comme aux pieds d'une reine un chat voluptueux.

J'eusse aimé voir son corps fleurir avec son âme
Et grandir librement dans ses terribles jeux;
Deviner si son cœur couve une sombre flamme
Aux humides brouillards qui nagent dans ses yeux;

Parcourir à loisir ses magnifiques formes;
Ramper sur le versant de ses genoux énormes,
Et parfois en été, quand les soleils malsains,

Lasse, la font s'étendre à travers la campagne,
Dormir nonchalamment à l'ombre de ses seins,
Comme un hameau paisible au pied d'une montagne.

Frank Guan

THE GIANTESS

(translation of "La Géante" by Charles Baudelaire)

In days when Nature, charged with strong caprice, would bless
With life each day bizarre, new children, red and green,
I would have loved to live beside a young giantess
Like a voluptuous cat by the feet of a queen.

I would have loved to see her soul and body bloom
And, sporting freely, grow more fearsome to be seen;
To figure if her heart concealed a flame of gloom
In tropic mists that swirled behind her pupils' screen;

To trace her splendid forms with slow and gentle ease;
To crawl upon the slope of her enormous knees;
And should the August suns, grown ill and overstressed,

Induce her, weak, to sprawl across the orange field,
To sleep in cool relief in the shade of her breast,
Like dreaming hamlets calm, colossal mountains shield.

Ray Keifetz

BECAUSE OUR STORY WAS TOO VAST

Because our story was too vast
my sister knocked on the church door
across the street where you could at least
understand the prayers, not only
because they were uttered in the language
we now spoke, but because they were uttered
in the life we now lived. In that church
they prayed to God in the language of lambs
whereas we prayed in the language of lions,
as if we still were . . .

Across the street they had a martyr.

We had hecatombs.

My father said *choose*—

a house in the suburbs, a husband,
children, dogs and cats
or the desert where flames leap
from dead branches you could not ignite
had you started on the day
God said light.

Like ourselves, he said, they burn
but are not consumed.

Her father's daughter, my sister said

Burn me.

Joel Long

LIVE AT THE SIP AND DIP

Pat Spoonheim, taking requests nightly

If her voice were a duplex, it would be condemned,
and cats would live there, ungroomed as palm bark.
The same goes for the organ at the Tiki lounge,
and the song, the late Johnny Cash, "Ring of Fire,"
burning with organ flare that frightens

the angel fish

in the Titan aquarium at the door, and the plecostomous
trims his mustache for the night. How long has that popcorn
been sitting in the basket? And how long has that mermaid
been gaping at me from the window beyond the bar,
framed in blue and breath-holding,

her hair drifting above her

like water weeds? Pat loves people, she says, so order a whiskey
and a song. I want to hear "Light my Fire," and she knows it,
knows every song. What she doesn't know she'll make up.

She turns everything she knows into vibrato and beneath it,
that ticking, cricket drum machine.

This gig started before you

were born and some have died since, and she never has to tear
down, never has to set up. Mick and Hank used to come in
sans Bobo the bulldog and pineapple, white mopped Mick
with her charm bracelet, pewter zodiac dangling, Cancer, Scorpio,
more fish, ringing beneath the organ moan, clicking the cash register
while the kissing fishes kissed underwater, their fins like transparent
Ginkgo leaves lit, thirty years before now.

I think I'd like a martini,

though they're bad here. Something about that tip jar makes me crave gin,
something about the stuffed llamas and pink giraffes stampeding
on cushions around her dyed red hair, glazed with hairspray
and Christmas lights and the simmering

organ, and the semi-drunks

leaning over the keyboard and fake books, mandrake—
how much sadness in this cup of brain? How much joy, dry as vinegar?
Play it live, Spoonheim, Play it live. The mermaid sings
underwater, her legs aching beneath her artificial fins. Some boy
just lost his swim trunks jumping from the poolside,
and everyone laughs at the murky scene, the boy's muscles
working like frantic little doves, like "The Girl from Ipanema."

Ann Lynn

ANTHOLOGY

*from Greek, a collection of poems,
literally, a gathering of flowers*

It is something, I think, he may never get over,
his sister taking her own life,
and as I rearrange my bookcase,
I find her *Norton Anthology*,
and it opens to her writing,
we don't really know whether all these poems go together,
she'd written at the top of Shakespeare's sonnets,
and then a page with pressed red petals, maybe from a rose,
and suddenly I realize what it must have meant,
how much life this must have taken,
this, and the death of his brother who was four
when my husband was only two,
watching his mother run with his brother's body,
how much this must have pressed on him,
pressed and flattened him like an animal on the road.

Peter Makuck

Now

A wrong turn in a new town.
An old neighborhood, azaleas and purple plum.

Warm afternoon.
Stuck behind a school bus with flashing lights.

You're late, but relax.
Something worthwhile might arrive.

Lower the window.
An orange meniscus lifting in the east. Not bad.

A young woman
waits at streetside with folded arms.

A small boy
jumps off the bus, his red backpack bouncing.

Your moment arrives.
He runs to his mom, and grabs her hand

years ago—your son, your wife.
The cars behind you begin to beep.

Wisteria sweetens the ripening light.
That wrong turn now seems right.

Betsy Martin

AFTER DINNER

My father cracking nuts
alone in the kitchen
I remember,
his forehead's gentle furrows
like the walnut's in his hand,
the ritual crunch,
patter of shells,
the clocklike rumination of his jaw,
contemplation and contentment
unfolding on his face
during this,
his favorite meal.
He lingers,
a slender silhouette
in the half-light.

Lesléa Newman

MY MOTHER IS

Angry at God for her terrible suffering
Bitter because no one knows how to save her
Cold all the time even under three blankets
Dead set on living as long as she's able
Eager to have all this over and done with
Frightened to die though she'll never admit it
Grumpy from pain that she says feels like labor
Hungry for foods she can no longer stomach
Insisting she's fine and needs no one to help her
Joylessly sipping the juice that I serve her
Kinked up from sitting for hours and hours
Longing to smoke cigarettes like she used to
Mourning her life which is fast disappearing
Nervous she'll drop dead with no one beside her
Offended whenever I use the word hospice
Pissed off she needs help to go to the bathroom
Quiet whenever I tell her I love her
Refusing her pain meds for fear of addiction
Scornful of doctors who say not to worry
Trying to make it through just one last summer
Unhinged at the thought of forsaking my father
Vain even now, eighty-four years and counting
Weary of being a burden to others
X-ing out names of dead friends in her phone book
Yearning to be with her mother in heaven
Zeroing in on her day of departure

Richard Newman

NECROMANCY SPELL

materials: one cup or mug belonging to departed
 spring rain water
 first growth of lavender
 orris root
 several drops of virgin's blood
 7 amaranth flowers
 something from the departed (hair from a brush,
 fingernail clippings, ashes if cremated)

This spell must be performed in spring, at midnight under a waxing moon. From favorite cup or mug from the departed, pour three cups of spring rain water into cauldron. Add rest of ingredients and boil until fragrant. Facing north and kneeling from pity, invoke the following:

Sleeping spirit, speak to me
over the spongy wall of death,
assume a form that I can see
and breathe with bloodless voice my breath.

Remember when this world spread
its arms in leaf and waves and stones,
embraced the living, spurned the dead,
back when you hugged your blood and bones.

Recall how once your world flowed
with blood and sap and melting streams,
before the endless empty road
of death a moment's flesh redeems.

Death nuzzles young in winter dens,
emerges with the April thaw.
Death gazes from the camera lens,

gleams in the teeth of a rusty saw.

Dead starlight shines through shrouded skies.
Death stretches when bones pop and creak,
but you are wanted back, so rise
from death's unfathomed sea and speak.

Jeremy Dae Paden

THE CAPITAN WILL LAND IN PARADISE

He will take the world to be a breast
sweet & heavy with milk

offered by God to him alone

Like the pear the school boy Augustine
stole & ate & loved

he will love & eat & steal

Then dream of Jerusalem
a pearl of great price to be bought

with American gold

O waters of the Orinoco
O lovely troubled waters

By your banks the captain

will pluck his harp & sing
He will have landed

in paradise & believed it his own

John Repp

TIJUANA FOOT BRIDGE

Forty-one, white, American, bourgeois
by dint of labor, good luck & behavior,
he trembled his lips at the poor—oh the poor,
oh the troubled brown ones, oh the girl
sawing “Oh Susanna” on a toy fiddle, red shirt
more hole than cloth, her—but who knows?—
father blatting mariachi, milky eyes wandering,
bare feet asphalt-black, a stack of soapstone
chess sets in front of his—but who knows?—
wife worrying a tortilla like a cud (for minutes
the stuff meandered, yellow paste down her chin),
a case of Chiclets at her left knee & these three,
this holy family of the holy poor three
of scores dancing & eating in the hundred-degree heat,
sleeping, bawling & selling selling selling,
but who knows what they know or are, who knows
whether car—maybe the cherry ’65 Mustang he saw
parked on the plaza or the ’55 Chevy without muffler,
bumpers or windshield that roared through his first
Mexican intersection—or nothing waits to ferry
them home, *cerveza* in a tub of ice sweating
in the way-back of a Gran Torino or dust & flies
along the daily trudge, rucksacks out at the seams,
who knows? But the man didn’t think any of this,
no, he sorrowed, he bought a woven cross the size
of his thumbnail, a Styrofoam cup of orange soda
& two boxes of gum, noted the sulfur-dioxide sunset,
& patted his wallet pocket six times a minute
& I’m no better, having learned nothing since Homer.

Rochelle Jewel Shapiro

WHAT SHE WAS LEFT WITH

What it cost my mother
to work behind the counter in my father's
store—yes, my father's, bought
only in his name, the awning read
“Herman's Grocery,” not “Herman's
and Bea's,” her Jergens lotion
hands cracked and raw from reaching
into cases for cold cuts, Pepsis.

What it must have cost this woman,
who used to sew her clothes from Vogue patterns,
to have to wear my father's plaid flannel shirts
in damp winter and an apron over
to protect her from pickle barrel splash.

No paycheck for her forty-hour week,
the shame of having to filch
from the register to buy herself
an antique cameo pin,
a pink-gold pinky ring, anything
she could hide from him,
to compensate
for fallen arches, varicose veins.

Only the children she did hard labor
to birth would be “his and hers.”
But their offspring's darts of hate
for having had to mother each other
would be aimed at her alone.

Rochelle Jewel Shapiro

THEY WERE DAMSONS

(William Carlos Williams' male friend's response to "This Is Just to Say")

I planted the plum tree myself, in full sunlight,
leeward, to safeguard the branches. I knelt,
dug the hole just larger than the root-span.

I hauled two full sprinkler cans
to shower those roots every day.
My palms still bear a row of blisters.

I let the plums ripen on the tree.
I kept two aside.

Once you were gone,
I was going to ask my wife to lie
on her back, naked on our four-poster,
and close her eyes. I was going
to place a cool plum
beneath each of her breasts,
watch her nipples, wide and brown
from those years of nursing,
tighten to pink tonguelets.

When the plums were warmed,
we'd eat them, lick the tart juice
from each other's lips.

When I went to the icebox,
the plums were gone.

David Starkey

CHRIST AMONG THE DOCTORS

Twelve years old and already he knows more than anyone
in Nazareth.

Absent from his parents for three days,
he's been in the temple disputing with the scholars.
They've shaken their grizzled heads, squinted their dim eyes,
expounded in stentorian voices, fought him
on every point
and lost.

*Where, they whisper among themselves, has this prepubescent prodigy
learned so much of the law that he can flaunt it
in the abode of God?*

They'd send him home,
but he claims this is his father's house.
The hours drone.
He talks so long they go silent and dry-tongued,
like victims of a drought, as he counts on his fingers
the number of ways they are wrong.

Joshua Michael Stewart

TWO TEENAGE BOYS AT A PICNIC TABLE

The one with blue eyes and spiked
bleached hair slices an orange-frosted
cupcake with a plastic knife, and plops
half on the spread-out napkin in front

of the boy in a short-sleeve flannel shirt
and red Converse. The blond sits tall
and straight. The other's hunched over
with his chin in the crux of his folded

arms. The one with the knife licks icing
off the blade as his eyebrows bounce
in a playful Groucho Marx kind of way.
The kid in canvas sneakers raises

his head, glances over his shoulder,
then tugs on the napkin to drag
the treat closer. He picks it up gently,
cranes his neck to bite into the bottom,

saving the sweetest for last. The young
man blessed with baby blues slides his arm
across the table, reaches for the other teen's
free hand. The flannel-clad boy pulls back,

but then lays his arm beside the other—close
enough for their arm hairs to share a kiss
of electricity, close enough for them
to feel the heat radiating from their skin.

Eugenie Juliet Theall

RAMON

for Monchi

Does Isabel see her cousin's face in every armed man
standing guard at the gate? Is he her favorite because he's gone
or because he made her laugh?

His larynx never blackened from nicotine, his knuckles
never knotted with arthritis, his chest hair never grew white
like a shell bleached from the sun.

Did he sneer at the rebel in passing, or was he dragged
from his home in the night? Was it bullet or machete
that tore through her family?

Each woman screamed, arms outstretched above her head
as if something wild and searing dislodged, crawled out.
Men wept in calloused hands caked with earth;
their backs, folded like mountains, shook.

They buried that boy, had to bury his dreams,
buried his books, razor, the last chip of soap,
the phone number of the girl he loved to dance with,
the cross around his neck, wrapped his blood-soaked shoes
in yucca leaves.

Maryfrances Wagner

KNOTS

After he broke her lamps and wrapped his car into a sculpture
around a pole, he tied knots, as calming as scotch:
bowline, sheet bend, cleat hitch, signatures he left on tables.

She wouldn't see him or answer the phone.
On cold nights in Cleveland, he poured his rum
neat and imagined her apartment in Kansas.

His fingers twisted nylon into *buntline, sheepshank,*
clove hitch. When he moved back to Kansas,
he couldn't calm his hands; tying no longer enough.

He drove across town, smashed
the glass door she would not open. He stood
suspended in a jagged clatter, his shirt

a Pollock of blood, his arm sliced into rows,
so much blood seeping into concrete.
Two hundred stitches later, he felt jagged

as a zipper. One night climbed into another. He tied again.
By midnight he had *timber hitch, eye splice, constrictor*.
Now cast out, he tied a *monkey fist*, his anchor, his slingshot.

Mark Lee Webb

CHUPACABRA OF CALABASAS

When you're twelve and your best friend
tells you his brother was treed last week

by a wild animal half-dog half-bear,
summer paints your canvas in shades

of rattlesnake and giant alligator lizard.
Your mom tells you to be careful, tarantulas

are out seeking water, migrating towards
backyard pools. You wade only knee-deep

into surf at Zuma Beach, hoping lifeguards
at Station Number Seven take their eyes off

the girls from Encino long enough to spot
pods of killer whales migrating down

the California Coast that Mr. Myers
talked about in sixth grade science class.

You stop hiking along fire breaks looking
for Indian relics and trilobites, afraid swirling

Santa Ana's might catch you on the wrong
side. The boy they say was murdered

by queers in the grape arbor, his body dumped
in a culvert next to the roadside rest area,

walks through morning fog rolling in waves
down Malibu Canyon. August in Calabasas,

school starts in two weeks, and you
know you'll be safe then because that

Chumash kid, the one always taking
your lunch money, isn't coming back.

Mark Lee Webb

HUENEME

home

Today you are moving to Mendocino,
your van packed with twelve pairs

of well-pressed khaki slacks, assorted
collared shirts, and the totem I found

the year you were born—
a rock with a hole in it

just like the rock the Chinook woman
clung to, her arms passing right through

the middle. I read you all the wrong
bedtime stories—Kappas luring

children to drowning deaths,
crab-fish Krakens spurting brine

from dreadful nostrils. You and I once
emptied a tidal pool of sea urchins,

but we never decorated your room
in abalone shells. I should have changed

you into a dolphin, taught you how to hold
your breath, whispered *Hueneme* in your ear.

Paul Willis

IN THE PARKING LOT

A man in the next car eats fried chicken,
wipes his hands on a newspaper, wads
it up, tosses it onto the asphalt.

I used to confront that kind,
pick up the trash,
say, *I think you dropped this.*

But waiting here in the parking lot,
watching the sunlight smear
the dust in arcs across my windshield,

I want to congratulate this guy
for putting something on the ground
the wind can make use of.

He's probably waiting for his wife too,
and no telling when his or mine
will emerge again from the doors of Macy's.

There is always the invitation,
of course, to accompany her,
but who would want to risk the chance

of having to try on a dinner jacket
or tasseled loafers, or to ponder those
elusive numbers of waist and collar and inseam?

As a child on such expeditions, I remember
prowling through circular racks of skirts
as if they were head-high ferns in a jungle,

except they weren't, and all the while
my mother taking her sweet time,
holding up ivory and lavender blouses

as if they were gifts, 40% off, from the gods.
C'mon, I said, tugging at the back of her knee.
But my mother never seemed to notice—

something about a department store
would deprive her of her sense of hearing.
So I am filled with sympathy as I

watch my neighbor's clump of news
gust away like a tumbleweed
toward those glassy doors in the distance—

a desperate message from both of us,
sent afloat from our desert islands,
asking for help, asking for some decent rescue.

Marian Willmott

PINK

Pink has a sweetness, a deceit,
a fantasy, ranked by beginner angels.
I don't wear pink.

I'm in love with white snow fields,
silent expanses, blue shadows
sculpting bone-like forms
uncluttered by life's
tangle of growth and decay.

Every muscle in my body aches
from gravity's ride, each birthday
a rock-climb with hooks and ropes
gazing at the rapture
of free fall, untethered.

Dear young woman, why
are you wearing pink stiletto heels?
Leggy, sexy, easily toppled.

Sex is one glass of wine
and a garlic-stuffed olive,
its urgent pull and dangerous undertow
have eased to a gentle ebb—
violins search here,
salty tears and broken vows.

I listen, hair faded to gray,
but my tongue sings out,
pink, moist and sensate,
defying me, refusing
every melancholy note
like a wild salmon
leaping upstream,
as it must.

Jeff Worley

IN THIS LIGHT

Heather, the new bartender at Drake's,
has exactly 14 ballpoint pens,
perfectly aligned, in her holster.

Her eyes are green almonds.
Her smile reaches into my chest
and turns my heart 35 years

counterclockwise. *Your eyes,*
she says, *are they hazel? Light brown?*
I hope it's Ok to say they're

beautiful in this light. Her words
hug the air for three long seconds.
Ya know, you look a little like my grandfather.

Words can do such wonderful work
sometimes we don't know when to stop.

Jeff Worley

PISSING FROM THE FRONT PORCH OF MY CABIN

Under the kingdom of stars, I reign,
in my golden years dispensing gold again.
I'll wave goodnight like this for as long as I totter,
the moon pausing to watch me turn wine into water.

Neil Shepard

STONE GIANT

At first I was hardly involved. A child snapped its photo in an open field. It was miles off, perhaps bothering someone else. But it had its eye on this corner of the pasture, too. The child saw only what appeared to be precarious stone upon stone, almost comically unbalanced, like a stone wall upended, turned vertical, and vertibratic boulders soft-clicking as if applauding its snapped photo. And though it moved slowly, and though it was still miles off, its stride, when it strode, could cloud a portion of sky. I must have gone off to another dream, this one safe enough to leave unmanned, but when I returned the child was still there in a corridor of pasture snapping exposure after exposure of the stone giant until its stride took it squarely into our space and landed with bomb-weight. Its footprint gouged a trench in the mud, its stone vertebrae reverberating strange gongs and chimes that deafened us. Then I was involved in clutching up the awe-struck child who had dropped the camera and grown stone-dumb in its presence, and I caught up that child and ran down a gauntlet of stone walls marking the separations, and not a neighbor came to roll boulders in that giant's way and trip it up, so it came on now crushing the camera though not really having seen it, came on now tall as a telephone pole but stony in its gait, nothing warm in its grain or texture, nothing funny about its stony frame gray as shadow, casting shadow over our land. Then we turned and ran from that undefended land down stone steps, the giant behind us, all of us going down a stone vault masons had painstakingly made millennia before us, some time of tumuli and brief allegiances and one's clay beginnings closer to one's stone endings than this child and I had known. And we felt a cold wind off the stone giant, and the enormous gonging filled our lungs, and we heard its strange mathematics coldly marking the boundaries of our lives, what little time was left. Ten steps would be our end, we heard it chime, and soon enough close ahead we saw the hall dead-end and heard the stone's enormous crush behind us, upon us, and turned and tried to scurry under its downturned petrifying limbs and bumped head on into its slow inexorable motions and saw to our horror, as we were scraped up and smashed into its grayness, joining the other carbon forms crushed against its petroglyphic chest, it hadn't even seen us. It had been drawn by the glint of the camera, the shiny opportunity, the small chance of light in all that gray expanse of time through which it endured.

Neil Shepard

[WIGGED OUT,]

she said, as if she'd strained her voice through Twitter-speak, lifted from a Facebook wall, and Skyped in front of me, there, but not there, every utterance and nickel-revelation reported. *I'm wiggged out, do I seem wiggged out, unmoored, unwrapped?* No, of course not. I calm the storm in her violet eyes, of course not, it's just your hair's gone black—what was it? Was it—*Boring brown*, she says, *a color I couldn't abide*. And your figure has thinned, no? *I was post-partum dumpy, now I'm fetching, and absurd, my life is an absurdist plot against itself, isn't it? You can see right through it? Am I transparent?* Yes, you have the look of a double-agent, I wink, someone I remember and—I squint—someone just swimming into view. There's a great big sun behind you and a lot of ocean. It's hard to see you—*No joke, she says, I've got dual citizenship now—no, not Canadian, I own land in Nova Scotia, but my old country's that ruined nightshade, that ripe tomato, Italy, so I spent months—months!—tracing my ancestry, heard the best shot at citizenship was to go there, so I went there, escaped—really escaped!—because my husband wanted me committed; my shrink said, Linda, you're uncommittable. It's impossible to get a commitment out of you, said my husband, so he started gathering signatures, even my mother and sister signed—all, all against me!—simply because I'd been sleep-deprived and post-partum and wiggged out a few months before and needed two weeks of sleep, so they—they committed me—got it? They washed their hands of me, sent me to be cleaned by an "institution," they were not committed to my health, they committed me, and I was committed to this memory—so, of course, I seemed ready to go down again, and they seemed ready to send me down, but no, I—fled—fled everything, even my kids, my babies!—you know how hard that had to be!—fled to Italy, to beg for my country back, and I got it—here's the passport, Italian!—and then, went to muse for a month in the south of France—and voila, the muse said I was ready to face them, all of them, with their butterfly nets—I had two passports and could fly, and I flew—and I could speak in ways I hadn't spoken before, it was all, suddenly, so clear—now, you tell me, straight, could a wiggged-out person say this?*

Molly Giles

RAM AND DAM

Summers, now that the kids are gone, Glen and I take the dog and drive out to the cabin on the lake. We stay all weekend. Glen has carpentry projects and the boat to keep him busy, but I don't have that much to do. The cabin doesn't have running water and we still use the outhouse—you can get used to anything, I guess—so a lot of my time is taken up with basic maintenance. I knock the cobwebs down from the rafters and wash the windows and rake the path through the oak trees and sweep up around the wood stove and do the dishes; to scour the cast iron skillet in lake water I have to squat on the limestone shelf, a chore that always makes me feel like an Osage squaw. Kidnapped! Sold to an old white man! Soon, Glen says, we'll have running water, but Glen's been saying "soon" for the last twenty years and the word has lost its meaning.

I always bring work from the office and lots of library books, but I rarely touch them. I swim; I take photos of the eagles; I groom the dog for ticks; I keep an eye out for copperheads; I knit. Mostly I lie out on the boat dock and watch the water. The light on the lake is ever-changing—a silky pink at dawn, a tawny tea at mid-morning (so clear you can see the gold eyes of the sunfish swirling under the pier posts), chopped liver at noon when the power boats whiz by, hammered pewter at two, tropical blue at four, a bowl of bronze as the sun sets.

Friends drop by from time to time, not as many as used to; the lake has changed, more young people now. Patti and Dodge pull their boat up to the dock to visit, but Dodge can be drunk by noon and Patti had a stroke, which makes it hard for her to talk, though she does like to sit and have her hand held. The crazy millionaire who bought up most of the south shore blows his bugle as he passes and the two gay college professors bring their guitars over to drink beer and jam with Glen on his fiddle.

In the late afternoon after everyone's left I might take a walk—the dog loves that and darts ahead of me—and we go up through the woods to the limestone bluffs to see the east side of the lake shining bright through the cedars. I always go to the very edge of the cliff and crouch to peer over to the limestone ledge beneath. The dog won't follow me there, but I need to see how my wild goats are doing. There are two of them—the old ram, dead since December, but regal as a pharaoh, kneels on the ledge facing the lake, nothing left of him now but bone and horns and hanks of black and silver hair, no smell even, and his young dam stands guard beside him, sometimes turning her head to look at me with alien

yellow eyes. I admire her for her loyalty and fear for her loneliness and I always say, “Stay safe” before I back away and leave.

Glen and I usually watch the sunset from the boat, motor turned off, drifting in the middle of the lake. Swallows dart and swoop around us; small mouth bass jump just out of casting reach; geese bray from the other shore. We take the iPad, so we can hear our favorite bluegrass show. Glenn sips Jack Daniels from his coffee cup, I sip red wine from a thermos. We watch the sky cook—it goes from pale scrambled yolks to hot burnt apricot jam to stovetop black when the stars come out. Wild honeysuckle wafts from the shore and the lake waters offer up their good stinks of gasoline and fish. When “The Pickin’ Post” is over we dock the boat and walk back up through the woods to the cabin. I cook our dinners on the camp stove—nothing fancy, just our usual standbys, spaghetti, venison chili, sometimes catfish or crappie, if Glenn’s caught any, and we eat on the porch by the light from the Coleman lantern. We talk—not much—I know he’s worried about his prostate, though the tests show his cancer’s in remission, and he knows I’m worried about our oldest, who has moved to Kansas City with yet another loser—but we spare each other our re-runs and stay still. Sometimes we share a joint. Glen plays his fiddle in the dark—*The Ashokan Farewell*, my favorite, it always breaks my heart even though he flubs the same chords every time—and *The Gardenia Waltz*, which, if I’m high enough, I’ll dance to. Then we push the dog down to the end of the futon, check the flannel sheets for brown recluses, make love if we’re lucky, and fall asleep.

I do not want to dream about the wild goats, but sometimes I do anyway, and when I open my eyes to the night and hear the soft sounds of the woods and the lake and the owls and the hunting foxes spilling secretly, beautifully, all around us, I have to hold my breath to bite back the terror. Nothing lasts, I know that. I turn to Glen and put my arm around his shoulder, gently, so as not to wake him, but once his apnea sets in I don’t bother being gentle and give his back such a good smack he sits up and smacks me right back and then we both lie there and laugh until we can’t laugh anymore and it’s time to get up, light the camp stove for coffee, and start a new day.

J. Robert Lennon

MARRIAGE (MYSTERY)

She says, You weren't like this when I married you.

Like what? he says.

This way, she says. Doing the things that hurt me.

I have always been this way, he says. The things that hurt you are part of my essential nature.

You hid them from me, she says.

Because, he says, I wanted you to marry me. You wouldn't have married me, if you'd known.

Then our marriage is a lie, she says.

No, he says. Our marriage is a mystery.

J. Robert Lennon

MARRIAGE (DOGS)

Years ago, he said, I want a dog, and she said, No, no dogs, you can have a dog with your second wife. At a different time, also years ago, she said, Maybe we should have a dog, and he said, Well, I am not going to live with a dog, so you'll have to choose between a dog and me.

Each recalls his or her own dog request as predating the other's. Each recalls his or her own dog objection to have been gentle and perfunctory. And so, one day, when she impulsively adopts a dog from the shelter at the mall, he responds by going out and adopting a dog from the shelter at the mall.

Each dislikes the other's dog. The dogs dislike each other. She even secretly dislikes her own dog, who smells terrible, even after a bath, and he secretly dislikes his own dog, who has a habit of eating things that are not food. But each feigns adoration of his or her own dog.

Neither is willing to so much as speak the name of the other's dog. They say things like:

Get your fucking dog off of the bed.

Your fucking dog is in my closet. Get the dog out of the fucking closet.

This fucking dog smells like a pile of shit.

This dog needs a walk. Walk this fucking dog.

Because neither will help fulfill the other's dog's needs, many redundant chores are undertaken, like walks, trips to the vet and to the supermarket for dog food, and the cleaning up of messes. Some messes are of unknown origin, as they are created while both humans are out of the house, and so each blames the other's dog and refuses to clean the messes up. She and he rarely see each other and when they do it is in the context of coincidental dog-related effort.

Get your dog away from my dog.

Your dog ate my dog's treat.

That's my dog's toy. Take it away from your dog.

That's your dog's piss. I watched it piss there.

The dogs bark all night, at each other and at passing dogs outside. Eventually a neighbor complains: Your dogs are waking up my dogs. You have to quiet your dogs.

Mind your own fucking business, she tells the neighbor.

Her husband agrees. We're not responsible, he says, for what your goddam dogs do.

Our dogs are the best, she goes on.

Try training your own goddam dogs, he adds.

That night, they have sex for the first time in three months, while their dogs whine, bark, and growl at this unfamiliar and inexplicable act.

The following day they return the dogs to the shelter. They say:

These dogs you gave us are out of control.

They're dangerous dogs.

Whoever had these dogs before us were psychopaths.

Those people have damaged these dogs irreparably.

As if to illustrate these points, the two dogs bark and snarl in rage and confusion.

No further pets are brought into the marriage after this, though months pass before the dog food, dog bowls, and dog toys are thrown away. In a few years, the entire episode is forgotten by everyone but the neighbor.

J. Robert Lennon

MARRIAGE (GAME)

He is holding a hundred-dollar bill, folded in half. He says, I've written something on this bill. If you can guess what it is, I'll give the bill to you.

I don't want to play this game, she says.

Please.

We're married, she says. We share our money. The bill is already half mine.

Conceptually owning fifty dollars is not the same thing as holding one hundred dollars in your hand, he says.

That's true, she admits. But I'm not going to play your game.

He says, Then you'll never know what I've written.

I don't want to know what you've written, she says.

Yes you do, he says.

He's right. She does want to know. But because he wants to show her, she says, No.

But then, five minutes later, she says, Fine. I'm not going to guess, but I want you to show it to me.

If you don't guess, you'll never get the money.

I don't care, she says.

So be it, he says, and unfolds the bill. In large black letters, he has written, YOU LOSE.

I hate you, she says, meaning it.

I'm sorry, he says, not meaning it. Here, he says. Take the money.

I don't want the money.

A few minutes later, he gets up and walks out of the room, leaving the bill lying on the table.

A few minutes later, she takes it.

J. Robert Lennon

MARRIAGE (MARRIAGE)

She said, We need to talk about our marriage.

He said, What is there to say?

That's what we need to talk about, she said.

He said, We need to talk about how there's nothing to say about our marriage?

No, she said, we need to talk about your unwillingness to address the problems in our marriage.

That's not a problem in our marriage, he said. That's a problem with me.

What's wrong with our marriage?

She took out her notebook and recited a list of the problems.

Those are all just complaints about me, he said. I could do the same thing.

He then recited, from memory, a list of complaints about her.

I see what you mean, she said. But I'm unhappy in our marriage. Are you?

Unhappy? he said. Yes.

She said, So, should we end our marriage?

He hesitated, seeming to grow angry in the silence. Then he burst out, arms waving in the air, You see! This is why we can't talk about our marriage!

But we're unhappy! she said.

He said, We're not supposed to be happy!

She threw down her notebook and shouted, You're such an asshole!

That's more like it, he said, smiling. So are you.

After a moment, she smiled as well.

Jill Allyn Rosser

ONE CONFUSION

The kanji for the word *color* derives from the representation of one person bending over another—i.e., *having sex*, explains this textbook on Japanese logographic characters. I can think of other possible motives for bending over another person, and suspect the author of needing time off, maybe even a couple of hours on an expensive leather couch. Only with a lot of squinting and mental grunting am I capable of making out a roughly male form above a sort of okay could-be-female one But even then I don't get it, maybe I need coffee: sex 'n color?

In a dictionary I learn that this radical for color, *iro*, pairs up with others to form the words for *sensual*, *sexy*, *complexion*, and soon I'm sorry I doubted the textbook author. That is, I'm convinced that the Japanese wordwrights were indeed associating color and sex, but I'm still vague about the connection myself. Certain huefully bottomed baboons not native to Japan might explain it, and perhaps those frogs in heat whose vocal pouches turn neon with excitement. There's lipstick, we all know why there's lipstick, but still. You could make the same case for music, for a blossom, for a dripping faucet, as being evocative of sexual desires and acts, why not a harp, a volcano, a geyser, a man in hockey gear, pistons coupling, blenders whirring (I would explain this if I had time). A thousand thoughts and images leap to mind when I see this figure bending, perhaps tenderly or passionately, but perhaps oppressively, brutally, or indifferently over this equally gender-debatable figure lying in infinite possible postures of bliss or revulsion, but not one of those images is a color.

Language is nothing if not logical. They had choices, the Japanese, just like everyone. They chose not to distinguish between blue and green, at least not until the mid-twentieth century, when it caused awkwardness in the business of textiles and the business of communication with foreigners, not necessarily in that order. They continue to choose chopsticks over cutlery. They choose to cultivate tiny old trees and to paint their young brides shoe-polish white, deathly white, at traditional weddings. They chose to see blue and green as one color for a long, long time, and to see all color as inherently sexual, and I want to know why.

Are Japanese schoolchildren giggling in the back row when this kanji blossoms on the blackboard, does it practically throb for them on the blackboard, their teacher's backside wiggling a little as she draws it for them? Do they still have to have identical haircuts in elementary school? Do they see the missionary

position as the dominant—make that “primary”—mode of intercourse? Did they get this from the English-speaking world, given that the first translation of sex in the same dictionary is *seksu*, derived clearly from our word for it? Where did we get such an ugly word for our favorite thing to do?

Not everyone’s favorite thing, good point. Castrati. But they were more or less forced to be castrati, and besides, they were usually not English-speaking. Nuns, then. Okay, priests. They even vow not to need sex. But whence the phrase *missionary position*?

Maybe it isn’t so far-fetched. The association of color and sex is nearly natural: both are primary needs. Primary colors, primary acts. We cannot imagine a colorless world, can we? Bees could never survive, or hummingbirds. Plus, we would be bored to death. Like living inside an *I Love Lucy* show with no windows. Sex too, we obviously have to have that, or our bodies wouldn’t leap to alertness every time a prospective mate walks by in a speedo or thong or short skirt and halter top or a classy three-piece suit and leather shoes so fresh and supple you just want to get down on your knees and sniff them.

But hold on. I am acquainted with a few blind people who lead fulfilling, even thrilling lives without one little speck of pigment to enhance their inner worlds. And I do know a woman—not a friend exactly, but she’s married to one, if even he is a friend, he is primarily my husband’s friend, though I like him a lot; at any rate this spouse-associated acquaintance does not at all care for music. I would have thought music mattered to everyone who drew breath. Once someone asked me, trying in that clunky, bending-over, man’s way to get to know me, at the time I thought in a purely friendly way, “Do you like music?” and I snapped back, “Gee, I dunno. Do you like color?” I was deeply offended, but it was probably, as I said, just some sort of high-heart-rate keep-your-pants-on small talk impulse gone awry, probably he was trying to imagine my breasts through my shirt, or maybe he was looking at the soft skin of my inner forearms when he said it, and wasn’t actually thinking, “She seems dead to the world all right.” Maybe I hadn’t slept much the night before. But this woman who does not care about music neither avoids nor listens to it; she is charming, has an engaging smile and bright eyes, and my husband’s friend loves her and she loves him, and he *loves* music, but he bends over her in quiet rooms.

So we can rule out music. How about art as an essential feature of human life? Just ask Newt Gingrich. What about water? But water, like air, is too obviously crucial for the maintenance of life. Really, color and sex are the only functionally optional essentials left.

So let’s say nuns don’t need sex, except the lesbian ones and those Bernini encountered, and grant that blind people don’t give a flying hoot about color,

except the ones that used to have it like Ray Charles, whose mother made him practice walking with his eyes shut before he stopped seeing altogether, and unless you count Stevie Wonder whose songs are just jammed with references to colors, and other perfectly lovely interesting people married to our husbands' friends (though to tell you the truth I have wondered about her, about a possible depthlessness, but how fair is that?). Now I'm even more confused about the radical that holds the species together. Companionship, food? But there are people who do without those things for days on end, weeks, longer, imprisoned in towers, closets, or fallen into wells or nearly crushed by collapsed beams. Or voluntarily, protesting some wrong. What do *they* need?

But now I finally spot it, the other entry under *iro*: the radical for color also means "character trait." I've been running up the down escalator all this time! This image, or the act it represents, is what ultimately distinguishes us from one another, what defines an individual, a sentient being. That is, the act of inclining is the defining characteristic of a person. That posture, one bending over another, domination or nurture or examination, is what gives us our markings, our true colors, this semantic embrace we pronounce *human*. And all this time I've spent poring over that kanji book and this dictionary—bending over not a figure but a figure of a figured figure—was it some elaborate avoidance of my humanity, or of coming to terms with it or acting on it in some sensual, complexion-altering manner? And is my written record of this search even more distancing, even more pallidly cocoon-shrouding than I care to think it is, and if I break out of it what color will I be then, and who will be bending over me, and what will I be inclined to do about it?

Geoff Dennis

HAUNT

She locks her keys in the car.

Come through the automatic doors of the pharmacy and walk to the far end of the parking lot where she sits hunched with her purse on a curb. Overhead a little tree with a top pruned round shades her. Hand her the paper bag. She crimps the edges around the box inside and you watch her fingers move.

Sit down on the curb. She rests her head on your shoulder for a few moments. Noticing your cigarette rock in your fingers, put it out and light another.

The sun is miraculously bright. Squint walking up the hill to where she's parked.

This morning you watched her comb her hair with her fingers, tuck it behind her ears, frown at the mirror, look over her shoulder at you, and you have not noticed the blonde streaks coloring her hair until now.

Waiting for Triple A, she folds into the grass along the curb. "I don't want the guy to see that I've been crying," she says. Her eyes are red and stubble grows where she has trimmed her eyebrows at the corners. On the edge of her mouth yolk has dried. "What?"

"I'll come home with you."

"I don't want my mom to see you."

"Are you and Sam going to Evan's party tonight?" Stare at the approaching truck, far away.

"I don't care about Sam," she says. Released by her, a great sigh blends to a sob.

"There he is," you say. "Here's Triple A." Kneel. "He'll unlock it. Stand up, he's here." You offer your hand and with one hand she takes yours and with the knuckles of the other rubs her eyes.

Watch the rippling glare of traffic as she joins its stream. Walk away.

Wait for the bus.

Recount the shower you took before breakfast. Sitting, cramped, on the floor of the shower you share a glass of water and there is something inconceivably pleasurable and funny about this and you both laugh in painful spurts. In the glass, the water grows warm. You will never be able to give up from your memory the dimensions of her body.

This thought drags on in your brain.

Pay the fare and sit down at the back. The bus rocks and churns along. When a passenger pulls the slack yellow cord to request a stop, an electric bell at the front of the bus dings. Look at the blind woman and her service dog.

Last night in your room.

Open the window. Let in the flies. They bat around the center of the room. Indecipherable noises come through the closed door. Little noises that maybe shouldn't carry so far and so seem closer or faster approaching than they might actually be.

It has never been this easy. Light hearted.

Examine your nakedness. It's difficult to imagine anyone's nudity, even your own, and not get it wrong. It's funny now the ways you pieced together her body in your head. And when she comes through the door and hurries it shut, it is unimaginably nice and you laugh.

"Did you open the window?" She mock-shivers holding onto her bare shoulders, climbs back into bed, pulls the covers over herself, and lies down with her head at the foot of the bed.

A knock on the door. Bang bang bang.

A voice. "Hey, you home?"

Exchange looks with her.

"I'm lying down," you say.

"You want to come watch TV?"

"I think I'm just going to pass out."

"Who's in there?"

"No one's in here."

"We're going to get drunk."

Listen to the footsteps pass from the hall onto the linoleum of the kitchen floor. Crawl over and kiss her. She runs a finger along the top of your ear. You can't help doing the same and touch her ear.

"Stop," she says. "I hate it when you do that, when you copy me."

The bus mounts the bridge. Winding away, the river bristles with endless little waves. Downtown is dusky and as the bus makes the arch of the bridge it goes down into the shade of the tall buildings.

All the stops are crowded.

Remember getting high. She held the tinfoil for you.

And after vomiting, after mashed potatoes, beans, corn on the cobb, Dixie plates, making out and finishing the balloon, lie wide awake and naked next to

her. She holds you, bites your shoulder, pulls you on top of her, and whispers. “Marry me when I turn eighteen.”

Now think about how ridiculous this is. But very slow the thought disintegrates and you forget until later.

Cynthia Robinson

BACK TO SCHOOL

Olivia leaves the engine running. Soon her ex-husband will check the time on his phone and point toward her car. Her son will turn around, see she's parked in the third spot from the left, but he'll count to make sure—she'll see his lips move. She picks up the pile of new listings from the passenger's seat. On top, a bungalow on Lakeshore Drive—just enough room for one, and maybe a dog. She looks at it for a moment, then zips the papers inside her briefcase.

Zach and Karl face one another across a table; the booths are full. They've had an early dinner. Zach lifts a large glass, drains it. Probably soda, maybe a milkshake. Karl lets him have too much sugar.

The late-summer sun, sinking behind the pines, shoots rays of orange through the back windows of the diner, outlining their profiles. So alike: big soft noses, full lips, jutting dimpled chins. Zach's shoulders are still rounded, turned in, child-like—he hasn't yet realized how big he is, how big he will be. A glowing blue rectangle changes hands—Karl has bought him another phone. Olivia bites her lip until it hurts.

She should have expected the phone: no father wants a silent son who plays video games for hours in his room with the door shut. To Karl, the phone means friends. Though Olivia has removed the lock. A hole the size of a fist, a big fist, in the living room wall is no big deal, said Karl. He's never acted out at my house. I just take him hunting. A bemused look from underneath Karl's brows; she's doing it wrong. Karl always knows best.

Olivia has patched the hole. Good as new. She rubs her jaw. Not broken, just bruised, it hardly hurts anymore. When school starts, so will the counting under her son's breath, the steps to the car, the steps down the hall, chewing on the right side on Wednesdays, the left on Thursdays and Saturdays, forty-nine, fifty, fifty-one.

Olivia has bought a lock for the knife drawer but doesn't know whether to put it on. Would that make her son angrier?

She's weeded the Gameboy, erasing the most violent ones, hoping he won't notice. But now of course there's the phone, and the bill will go to Karl. Zach can download new games, worse ones.

Once it's happened yet again you notice the latest boy looks like all the others. Not enough sunlight, hair needs a trim. Eyes empty, no longer seeking anything. Black clothes. What do the mothers of boys with guns miss, overlook, choose not to see? Once it's happened it's too late.

Inside the diner they stand. They're wearing fatigues, black and grey. Karl must have taken him to the mall. Olivia remembers the sick weight in her stomach when the school called. She'd been showing a house. She remembers the choking relief shooting past her heart into her throat—a forgotten permission slip, the teacher said.

Tonight, after she hears him sleeping, after assuring herself he will not wake, Olivia will sift through photographs, trying to see when it happened, when it was he'd broken.

Paul Cody

NOW HERE

One

June 1989

The last time Hal saw his father, Innis was lying on a bed, in a room, on the sixth floor of a hospital in Boston. He was bones in a bag of skin.

This was just before six, on a shining Sunday morning in early June.

Innis was the white-gray color of ashes, and his lips, his ears, his fingertips, were faintly blue. His eyes were not quite closed, and his mouth was open, as though there was something else to see, something left to say.

But there wasn't, of course. There was nothing.

After sixty-eight years, five kids, life, work, marriage, he was as deep down and far away as he could be, in this room a few miles from the room where he was born.

Three days later, a funeral Mass was said for Innis in an old church in Newton, about a mile from the house where he had lived and raised his family, where his wife and mother still lived, about a half mile from the house where he had grown up.

The church was one of the largest in the archdiocese of Boston, an enormous old pile of red brick, across the street from the Massachusetts Turnpike, in a blue-collar, mostly Irish and Italian-American neighborhood called Nonantum, or The Lake. Our Lady Help of Christians had a main altar, a smaller altar on each side of the big one, soaring vaulted ceilings painted gold, with faded frescoes of bearded Biblical figures in robes, and cherubs, harps, shepherd crooks, sheep, and men and women with gold haloes surrounding their heads.

Mary wore sky-blue robes, and Jesus was very thin, and his arms were down at his sides, his hands open and facing front as though he was asking for something. It was hard for Hal to see his open hands without thinking of spikes and the cross.

Built in 1878, the wood pews were dark and sagging, the church looked its age. The gold paint was dull.

Our Lady's could hold maybe a thousand people, but there were no more than seventy or eighty people at the funeral. Innis's ninety-two year old mother was there, as well as a handful of cousins, each of his sons and daughters, their

husbands and wives, several nieces, Innis's wife, and stray friends of Hal's, of his brothers and sisters, from childhood, high school, from various jobs.

None of the sons and daughters lived in Newton anymore. None of them had lived there for years. Only the mother and grandmother still lived in the big old two-family house where the kids had all grown up, a house the parents had bought a month before Hal was born. It had rattling windows, needed paint, and some rooms had no electrical outlets on the walls, so brown extension wires were plugged into the overhead light sockets, fixed with black electrical tape across the ceiling to corners of the rooms, then down to the floors, where lamps or clocks or radios were plugged in.

The tape and wires looked like huge stitches or spiders, but the kids hardly noticed until after they had moved away, and then came back to visit, and looked up, startled, that they used to ignore such things.

The church, which awed them as kids, which seemed to soar and shine, whose elaborate wedding cake altar looked like marble, whose paintings and Latin and chants seemed to evoke glory and mystery, and where at midnight Mass on Christmas a thousand people gathered, smelling of pine, wool, perfume and incense, of the winter night outside, and seemed to carry them out and over and beyond the neighborhood—the church now was shabby.

The priest said, Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is: that I may know how frail I am.

Innis was a small man. In his Army physical, in Greensboro, North Carolina, in August 1942, at age twenty-one, he was listed at five foot four and a half inches tall. He weighed one hundred and twenty-seven pounds. He never weighed much more than one hundred and forty pounds his whole life.

In the last few months, suffering with central and obstructive sleep apnea, the pulmonary illness which would lead to his death, his weight went down to one hundred and twenty, one hundred and eleven, one hundred and five, ninety-seven, ninety-three, and in the end, well below ninety.

A ventilator breathed for him, so he could not talk. The machine hissed and clicked several times a minute.

He drifted in and out of consciousness, and as the days and weeks went by, he opened his eyes less and less, and he didn't seem to recognize very much. His eyes were somewhere between gray and blue, between ocean and sky, summer and winter.

In almost every way that mattered, he was disappearing well before his death.

And because Innis had requested that his body be given to science, to become a cadaver at a medical school in Boston, there was no casket, no urn, no father, at his funeral Mass.

Instead of that large and shining presence in the front of the middle aisle, the burnished coffin, the boxed eloquence of death, there was—no body.

No thing.

Hal wondered how you got from there to here.

His father was immense in his absence.

He was nowhere.

In death, after so much shy and quiet life, he was now here.

Two

April 1993

The room was on the third floor and had no windows. Everything but the ceiling was tiled, yellow and light green on the walls, black and white tile on the floor like an ice cream shop. Big silver lights hung from the ceiling, and shined so bright that Hal kept blinking at first—like staring at small suns.

Ann was lying on her back on a tall wide table, and a green drape hung above her neck, blocking her view of—of what was going on, of her body, of anything but the drape, blocking her view of—everything.

Hal sat low, behind her head, behind the drape, crouched with a man named Lodge, an anaesthesiologist. Ann blinked, licked her lips, bit her lower lip, blinked again.

Her eyes were gray.

Lodge said, How we doing?

Ann laughed. Can't feel a thing.

That's how we want it, Lodge said.

Lodge was lean, looked hungry, had a thin nose, and wore glasses with tiny round frames that seemed like something you'd see on a nineteenth-century minister. His eyes were alert and brown. He wore a pale blue cap that covered his hair.

Eight or nine people stood around the table, all of them in blue scrubs, caps, all wearing latex gloves and masks. Most of them wore glasses, and one man and one woman wore black devices on the front of their glasses that had extra lights and lenses. Three of them wore thin white coats over their scrubs. There were machines and wires, tubes and monitors all over the room. There were stainless steel cabinets with glass doors, stacks of towels and shiny tools on trays, and the monitors had red and blue, white and purple lines and bubbles, straight, jagged, clean, broken—pushing colored light on the black screens.

The doctors and nurses said things, but Hal understood almost nothing of what they said. He heard the word, Grip, or, Rip.

He heard, Ramp. Clamp. Amp. Lamp.

A woman said, Cramp?

Someone whispered, Okay.

Something snapped, beeped, tore like tape or Velcro. Metal clattered on a metal tray; there was more clatter and clinks.

I think, someone said.

A woman said, Good.

There you go, a voice said. A man? A woman?

Lodge called out, We got one hundred twenty-six over eighty-two, and a woman said, Nice. A man said, I like that.

A woman said, You good, Ann?

Ann smiled. Her cheeks were red, as in fever, the rest of her face was pale.

Yeah, she said. Then louder, Yeah. No pain.

Lodge dabbed at her forehead with a damp facecloth.

Hal saw a towel, deep red, scarlet with blood, dripping, lifted away from the table and dropped to the floor with a slap.

The people were alert, were calm, he thought. He was pretty sure Ann couldn't see the towel.

He wanted to rise from his seat a few inches, peek over the curtain, but two nurses and Lodge had told him before coming into the room that that would be a serious mistake.

You don't want to do that, Lodge said.

He had looked at Lodge, and a dark-haired nurse, maybe seeing doubt or hesitation in Hal's eyes, said, We already have one patient, we don't need the father flat out on the floor.

She smiled, then two beats later, Lodge smiled.

Hal noticed the word, Father. No one had ever called him that.

The other nurse, who was already wearing blue scrubs and was tiny, asked if he'd eaten anything.

He'd been up a long time. This was four or five in the morning, and he and Ann had been up since six the previous morning.

Yesterday was Sunday. Now it was Monday.

Eat?

Food, the tiny nurse said.

He'd been feeding Ann ice chips and sips of ginger ale. He thought he'd had some of that.

Hal shrugged. He felt slow and stupid.

The dark-haired nurse got him a small carton of orange juice. She said to

drink all of it, then handed him scrubs, a cap, paper booties to pull over his shoes.

Change in there, she said, pointing to a bathroom.

His face was a big round moon in the mirror. A friend once told him he was Babe Ruth wearing glasses. Only now the Babe was spent, the Babe was scared.

The orange juice, even after he poured it into a paper cup, tasted of wax carton, like the milk they used to get for snack in kindergarten.

He didn't know where Ann was. Some nurses had wheeled her away on a gurney. They put a needle in her arm, another in the back of her hand, attached thin pale tubes to the needles, ran the tubes to bottles hung upside down from poles that rose on each side of the gurney. Her body had been taken over, occupied, by pain so huge, so overwhelming, that she had all but disappeared into a thin-lipped, white and utterly rigid muscle and cramp and big blade of nerve.

She didn't scream, didn't even gasp or hiss anymore. She was way past that.

Hal thought she'd die. He was pretty sure this wouldn't have a happy end. It was too extreme, too violent, so far past anything he'd ever been near. Some crazy, giant force of nature had life and now wanted out of Ann's body and into the world. It had started at a microscopic level, had grown quietly and inexorably, patiently, and now it was monstrous large. It was bigger than God, and it was in the very middle of Ann, and it wanted out, and it was tearing her, burning and slashing and bleeding her, and it was not going to stop.

The pain had been so far past endurable for eight, ten, thirteen, sixteen, nineteen hours—that Hal couldn't believe there was still life.

That Ann was alive, and that what was inside her was alive, this fierce thing.

Lodge half stood, looked over the curtain. Even though Lodge was wearing a mask, Hal thought Lodge smiled, thought his eyes, the muscles in his cheeks, changed.

Ann was no longer biting her lip.

A doctor, a tall woman, said, We got a linebacker here.

And held something up.

Some thing covered with blood, streaked with cheese, something blue and purple, something bunched and wrinkled like an old man, something that did not come from this world, that was unlike anything in the room, human or nonhuman.

Watch him pink up, Lodge said, and they wiped the blood, the cheese, and then.

And then.

He was nine pounds. He was twenty and one-half inches long. This was
7:01 a.m.

Monday.

Eyes the color of slate, of winter sky, deep in the country.

So.

Flora K. Schildknecht

A BAD AND SINFUL GIRL

What exactly it was about Gail that made her feel so unsettled she could not say, but looking at the back of Gail's head Maria wanted to grasp the girl's thin, ash colored ponytail and give it a good yank—or better yet take the heavy pair of craft scissors she kept in her desk and chop the girl's offensively drab, oily gather of hair right off. Maria half listened to their third grade teacher, Mr. Carlson, describe a math problem they were supposed to be solving, if fifteen of you are buying milk for lunch, and ten are buying juice, how many more students are getting milk instead of juice. Maria thought about how ugly Gail looked. Maria was convinced that girls should, at the very least, be pretty. Or better, they should be strong. Better still they should be fierce and mischievous and possessed of all the magic and cunning that would later enable them to rule not only their own destinies, but perhaps even the world. Gail was not pretty and she was certainly not fierce. Pale and almost translucent, her skin was stretched tight over her skinny body. A map of blue veins covered her like a maze of corporeal tributaries. Gail's veins pulsed alarmingly when she was frightened. She was frightened often.

Mr. Carlson called Gail to the front of the class to solve the problem on the board. Gail approached hesitantly, one foot trailing behind the other, as if she were prepared to reverse course at the first sign of danger. But Mr. Carlson was patient and gentle, allowing her to her take her time. His excessive kindness infuriated Maria. And how could Gail take so long to do everything? The answer was five. Fifteen minus ten was five. Bored, she flipped through her science book, stopping at a picture of a young gazelle, lithe and tawny. She decided that Gail was an inverted version of the gazelle—a stunted, albino, mutant gazelle with thin, colorless hair.

Although Maria knew it was wrong to dislike Gail for being awkward and weak, she could not help it. In Sunday school her teacher, a willowy young woman who was not strong but possessed an irresistibly supple smile, praised the virtues of Gail and her type, saying “blessed are the weak,” but this had little practical effect on Maria's feelings of disgust toward Gail. Everything about Sunday school fascinated Maria. Ms. Willow, whose real name was Amy Wilson, told almost unbelievable stories about what God wanted and how He could make the most amazing things happen—He could make a giant whale swallow you whole, just to teach you a lesson. He could cover the whole planet with water if he put his mind to it. He could, according to Ms. Willow, even grant

the prayers of those who were sincere and prayed everyday, which was of great interest to Maria, since there were many things she wanted.

On Friday, Mr. Carlson's students had their once a week art class. The quiet, dark boy that Maria usually sat with was absent. Maria and Gail were seated across from each other at the high Formica table and given a box of pastels to share. The art room was located in a basement with no windows, and the air felt hot and did not move much. Maria noted Gail was wearing one of her ugliest outfits yet: bright pink corduroy pants with little green hippos on them, paired with a very light pink turtleneck that made her face look pale and unformed. Maria wound a strand of her own thick, dark hair around her finger and sniffed. Her hair still smelled like her mother's shampoo, Pantene. She sniffed the air that hung around Gail. Gail did not smell like Pantene, Gail smelled like urine.

"Listen. These colors here," Maria extracted all the bright and colorful pastels from the box and arranged them on her side of the table, "these are all mine. And if you touch them I'll tell everyone you peed yourself."

"But, we're supposed to share . . ." Gail looked at the table as she spoke, running her finger across its chipped edge, rubbing some raw color into her bluish fingertips.

"We are sharing. All these brown and gray and black ones are yours."

Maria bent over her paper and began to work. She loved art class. Every time she painted or drew something and brought it home, her parents told her how wonderful it was. Surveying the thick, pleasingly pebbled surface of the blank paper, Maria felt a surge of confidence and sensed that today she would create something truly magnificent.

She decided she would pray as she worked. She prayed she would become an artist but that her parents would buy her art supplies of her very own, so she could practice her craft at home and never have to share with Gail again—she could just tell the teacher she had a stomach ache and then she would be allowed to lie down in the nurse's office during art class from now on.

Maria drew a picture of her future self. She had thick, abundant hair and a lovely, terrifying smile full of teeth that glittered as if she had bitten off pieces of stars from the night sky. Maria of the future wore a long scarlet dress. Maria of the future was very tall, and she was surrounded by wild animals, drawn to her by her incredible artistic talent. The animals all wanted her to draw pictures of them.

Maria assessed her picture and decided it was her best work yet. There were small flaws; the proportions of the girl's face were somewhat skewed, her smile a little too large. Some of the animals were difficult to recognize without black outlines, but she had given the black pastels to Gail and was not about to ask

for them back. Maria was very pleased until she looked over at Gail's drawing.

Using only the dullest colors, Gail had drawn something amazing. It was a portrait of Maria herself in the process of drawing, bent over the table, pastel in hand, a look of intense concentration on her face. The drawing was more like a photograph than any drawing Maria had ever seen. The face was turned just slightly, not looking straight on, not turned all the way to the side, but somewhere between. A thin series of lines represented the side of the face that was turned away. The lines were short dashes when Maria looked at them individually, but when viewed together they made the contour of a cheek, and even an eye, complete with delicate eyelashes. Looking at the image of herself on the page, Maria realized with rising emotion that Gail's drawing was better than hers. The strokes Gail used were minimal and elegant. Maria's lines, which she had originally thought strong, now looked thick and cumbersome. Maria frowned. Gail was smiling, just a little. Maria felt a flush rising across her chest and up her neck, and wondered if she was turning red.

"Is this supposed to be me?" she said in her most scornful voice, determined to hide the mix of admiration and frustration that was consuming her like a fever. Gail stood up and backed away from her drawing, the smile gone, once again looking more like a frightened animal than a girl.

"You don't like it." Gail was now, in effect, talking to the floor. "I'm sorry."

The bell rang and Gail bolted from the room without her drawing, her corduroy pants making fast little zhoop-zhoop-zhoop sounds as she went.

At dinner Maria nibbled at her food pensively. It was one of her favorite meals and she felt sure that her parents would notice and ask her what was wrong. She shoved her lasagna this way and that on her plate. She cut off small pieces and placed them on the edge of the dish. It was difficult not to eat much. The lasagna was layered with thinly sliced mushrooms and tender zucchini, and Maria could taste at least three distinctly different cheeses in the small bites she allowed herself. Finally her parents stopped yammering back and forth about the upcoming election and asked her what was wrong. With a reluctant sigh she'd practiced in the mirror, she explained her problem. She was forced to sit with a smelly, nasty girl in art class who copied her work and hoarded all the black pastels. In spite of this she loved to draw and would really like for them to buy her some art supplies, because she wanted more than anything to become an artist someday. Her parents looked satisfyingly concerned, and her mother, ever anxious that things should go as Maria wished, pursed her lips and promised to "look into the matter."

Every morning thereafter Maria stared angrily at the back of Gail's head, and prayed: Dear God. Please don't make me sit next to Gail, because she is dis-

gusting and steals my ideas. If you do this for me I will be good from now on, I promise. After three days of this Gail was absent from class, and Maria thought perhaps her prayers had been answered. But the fourth morning Gail was back again, looking even more weak and disheveled, and sneezing frequently into a dirty tissue she kept tucked in the sleeve of her cheap grey sweater. Just looking at Gail made Maria want to go wash her hands in hot, soapy water.

In art class Maria was relieved to find herself seated across from a girl named Rebecca who smelled like vanilla lotion and was dressed in a freshly pressed denim skirt and a white angora sweater. Rebecca was very pretty, with blue eyes and blonde hair. Rebecca was content to draw brown kitty cats and red hearts, all of which looked reassuringly childish. She was appropriately impressed by Maria's drawing of the whale that swallowed the biblical Jonah. Rebecca leaned across the table to admire Maria's clean lines that defined the whale's flippers and tail, making little murmurs of appreciation. Maria noticed Rebecca was leaning on her own drawing, and red pastel was being ground into her white sweater, but she didn't see any reason to mention it.

Halfway through the class Rebecca noticed the big smudge of red pastel on her sweater and began crying inconsolably. She had to be led out of the room to go cry in the hall. Once Rebecca was gone, Maria felt someone staring at her. She heard a wet, sniffling sound, and turned to see Gail eyeing her from the next table over. There was accusation in her gaze; she obviously thought that Maria had somehow made Rebecca soil her sweater, and made her cry.

When art class was over, Maria saw Gail take her trademark tentative steps toward the art teacher. Ms. Harding was a large, round woman who always wore bright, shapeless dresses with sandals, and her largeness made Gail appear even smaller than usual. Maria had never seen Gail approach a teacher unless called on. She stepped close to Ms. Harding and said something very quietly. The teacher made a point of kneeling down, knees cracking loudly, so she could place her ear closer to Gail's thin bluish lips. Maria wanted to stay and watch. She was sure Gail was telling lies about her, saying it was Maria's fault that pretty Rebecca had ruined her sweater and was now probably crying in the nurse's office. Maria would have to set the record straight. She started walking purposefully toward them, but Ms. Harding caught Maria's eye and shook her head firmly. "Maria. Go back to Mr. Carlson's room with your class." Her tone was so dark and full of authority that Maria found herself unable to do anything but obey.

Maria waited for Gail to come back to Mr. Carlson's room. Where could she be? Had Gail told the art teacher about how Maria had taken all the good pastels last week? What had Gail said about Maria ruining Rebecca's sweater? Rebecca herself had calmed considerably, she sat on the other side of the room,

with her feet primly tucked underneath her in her seat. Rebecca's eyes were puffy but dry, and her sweater had been turned inside out so the stain was not visible.

Finally Gail appeared. She was wearing different pants and looked very sulen. The elastic she always wore in her hair was gone, and her hair hung like a dirty veil across her hunched shoulders. Maria leaned toward her and noticed a smell, like an old person's closet—stale and antiseptic.

"Hey Gail," she whispered. Gail turned around and gave her a wounded look from behind the limp curtain of her hair. Maria sat back in her seat.

Instead of getting on the bus after school Maria followed Gail, who always walked home. As they rounded the corner of the large red brick gymnasium Maria ran up alongside Gail and shoved her against the wall, hard enough to knock the wind out of her. The girl's exhalation was warm and sour.

"What did you say to Ms. Harding about me?" Maria used the most threatening voice she had, and Gail looked frightened, but not as frightened as Maria had hoped.

"Nothing."

Gail's chin quivered and jutted forward, and when she spoke Maria could see that her teeth needed badly to be brushed. She slapped Gail across the face, harder than she had expected to. Gail's eyes squeezed shut and blood oozed from her left nostril. Maria was shocked by the sight of the blood—she had never hit anyone so hard before and had not really wanted to make Gail bleed, but it was too late to back out now. She shook Gail by the shoulders.

"Then what were you talking to her about?"

Gail started to cry in earnest now, snot mixing with the blood dripping from her nose. Maria felt the situation slipping out of her control, but gave Gail another good shake anyway.

"I couldn't make it in time," Gail sobbed. Maria slowly realized what was going on. She remembered the way that Gail had smelled before, like pee, and thought about the different pants she had returned to class in, the ones that smelled like storage. She let go of Gail's shoulders, and the girl stumbled away, before breaking into a run, leaving Maria standing alone by the gym with the feeling she had just done something horrible that could never be undone. Maria walked the mile to her own house with the growing feeling that what had just happened proved she was actually, at her core, very, very bad. Gail would tell her parents who would then tell Maria's parents and then everyone would know the truth: she was a wicked, cruel little girl.

The next Sunday was terrible. Ms. Willow telling the story of the Good Samaritan, but Maria could hardly pay her any attention. She was consumed with fear that Gail would tell someone what she had done. She needed a way to make Gail go away. At the end of the story, Ms. Willow said something interest-

ing. She asked the children to remember her and her husband in their prayers, because they were trying to sell their house. She said they had buried a little statue of Saint Joseph in their yard, and were saying a prayer to him nine times a day, asking him to ask God to help them. This was called intercession. “Why do you ask the saint when you could just ask God yourself?”

Ms. Willow smiled her placid smile, and it was clear that this was the question she had wanted someone to ask. “We ask the saints to intercede for us because they are especially close to God. They have His ear.”

“So why do you bury the statue in the yard?”

Just for a moment Ms. Willow’s smile faltered, and Maria could tell this was an unexpected and unwelcome question. Ms. Willow looked as though she did not know how to answer. “It’s a tradition.” Her gentle smile turned thin and hard for a moment, then she caught herself and gave Maria a knowing, conspiratorial smile. “Is there something you want to pray for, Maria?”

Maria said nothing. She had no intention of sharing her plan for personal salvation with Ms. Willow, or anyone else. She feigned shyness and instead offered the Sunday school teacher her most beguiling smile.

“You don’t have to tell me. But the most important thing is the prayer. Nine times. Every day. Until your prayers are answered.”

During playtime Maria nonchalantly wandered over to the small nativity displayed in the corner of the room. She slipped the small statue of St. Joseph into the pocket of her dress, which fortunately had lots of ruffles that disguised the small, saint-shaped bulge over her left thigh. Maria said a little prayer asking God to forgive her for stealing. She knew stealing was technically bad, but this was for a greater purpose. She knew what she had to do, and why her prayers of the past had not been answered. She’d needed to say them nine times, and she’d needed a statue of St. Joseph.

The moon was low and bright when Maria stepped into the backyard in her nightgown to bury St. Joseph. The grass was dry under her feet and made crisp little sounds as she walked over to the vegetable garden. The tomato plants were fanning out inside their supportive cages, already covered with tiny, whitish-green tomatoes that shone, waxy and pale in the moonlight. She plunged her hands into the soil. Maria had never been outside this late at night alone before. A whispering, crunching sound near the hydrangeas made her pulse quicken, and she stopped digging for a moment. The sound of her own heart-beat throbbed and rushed between her ears. She forced herself to look in the direction of the sound. A small tan rabbit with a white tail munched on clover and regarded her with a quizzical eye. Maria made an encouraging sound and plucked a tomato, offering it to the rabbit, who hopped away. She felt silly for trying to make friends.

St. Joseph looked strange by himself. He was usually positioned next to Mary. The small, bearded man had one arm raised in a meaningless protective gesture. And he wore an expression of earnest adoration as he gazed down at the space where the baby Jesus would normally be.

Maria gave his little plastic face a kiss before putting him in the ground. She added the tomato she had offered the rabbit and scooped dirt into the hole. She made the sign of the cross, touching her fingers to her forehead, belly, and shoulders. She solemnly closed her eyes and whispered her prayer into the quiet night air. The air seemed clearer than the air during the daytime, as if her words might float up to God more easily without all the noise and sunlight in the way.

“Dear Saint Joseph, I need you to ask God to do a favor for me. Please make Gail Wilson go away forever, so she can’t tell anyone that I hit her and made her nose bleed.” Maria said it eight more times, then added, as she had seen Ms. Willow do, “In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

Maria made the sign of the cross once more, then walked quickly back to the house. She felt that for the first time in her life she’d said a real prayer, a prayer that had been heard and might be answered. Maria tingled all over with the awareness that she was alive and had just had a secret conversation with a saint.

On Monday Gail’s seat was empty. There was no greasy ponytail begging to be cut off, there were no mismatched clothes to silently ridicule. Every time she let her eyes trace the contour of the empty chair in front of her, Maria felt the same rush of excitement she had experienced immediately after she prayed to Saint Joseph. He’d heard her. He’d talked to God about her problem and it had been fixed. The thrill of Gail’s removal was almost overshadowed by the realization she had personally communicated, through Joseph, with God. This meant that it was all true, everything they said at church and in the Bible was real, and God was real. Not in some make-believe way but real in the same way she was real and school was real and her parents were real. It was a revelation. Maria looked lovingly at Gail’s empty desk, proof she lived in a universe where God was real and her wishes could be granted.

For the rest of the week Maria was in a lovely mood. Summer vacation would begin in less than a month, and she was enjoying her days at school so much more now that Gail was out of the picture. At lunch she sat with Rebecca, who always had nice clothes and liked to make lists of the names of boys who she might someday marry. Rebecca taught Maria how to make little folded paper puzzles that concealed each boy’s name under a numbered flap, and they would spend lunch discovering and rediscovering their potential husbands-to-be. There were so many names to think about: Grant, Andrew, Nick, Trevor. The name “Gail” had slipped from Maria’s mind.

Rebecca asked if Maria would like to come over to her house on Saturday and see her room. She claimed to have a hundred Barbie dolls. According to Rebecca some of the dolls lived in a big pink house, some had a stable with horses, and some Barbies liked to just hang out by their pool. While Maria doubted anyone could really own that many Barbies, she liked Rebecca and wanted to see her room.

By Friday Maria had all but forgotten about Gail, the conversation with Saint Joseph and her revelation about the existence of God. But when Mr. Carlson asked for everyone's attention right after they said the Pledge of Allegiance, Maria looked at Gail's empty desk and began to wonder what exactly God had done with her. Resting his hands on the back of Gail's chair, Mr. Carlson told them Gail had developed a rare disease, something called Lymphoma, and she was going to have to stay in a hospital until she got better. When he mentioned "getting better" Mr. Carlson's voice cracked and he began to breathe heavily, and after a moment Maria realized that he was crying, something she had never seen an adult do. Mr. Carlson got hold of himself and explained how Gail had collapsed Monday before class, and might not return to school at all this year.

Maria felt guilt settle in her stomach like a large cold stone. She trudged through the rest of the day filled with a sense of dread. During art class Maria did not want to draw. She made a series of lines and circles on the page to keep her hands busy, but she really wanted to find a place to hide. She noticed that Rebecca was drawing something other than her usual cats-and-hearts motif and asked her about it. Rebecca seemed bothered that Maria should have to ask what she was drawing, and she explained the picture to her as if Maria were very slow. "Here's Gail in bed at the hospital." Rebecca gestured to a stick figure lying prostrate on a lopsided blue square. "And these are the angels waiting to take her up to heaven." The angels Rebecca pointed to were misshapen and awkward, but nonetheless looked ready to carry Gail up and out of the bed.

Maria knew her friend was a simple girl who sometimes misunderstood the things adults said, so she gently corrected her. "Mr. Carlson didn't say that Gail was going to die. She's only going to be in the hospital until she gets better." Maria realized as she spoke how unlikely this sounded.

Rebecca just looked at her and began coloring the angels' wings a deep blue.

When they got back to their classroom Gail's desk was gone, and Grant and Sophie's desks, which had been on either side of Gail, had been pushed together.

As soon as she got home, Maria slipped into her backyard and walked briskly over to where she had buried St. Joseph, right in the middle of the garden between the second and third tomato plants. But where he should have been there was just a hole, and next to the hole was the rabbit-chewed nub of what used to be a tomato. Maria sat down in the dirt and looked under the

plants for St. Joseph. She looked under the hydrangea bush and along the line of the fence, but he was not there.

Maria went inside and flung herself on her bed. She prayed to God—not just nine but ninety times—not to make Gail die. She told God all she had wanted was for Gail to go away, not to heaven but to someplace far off but nice sounding. Like California.

Rebecca's mother called the next day to see when Maria was coming over. Maria told her parents she was not feeling well and wanted to stay home.

Maria prayed everyday for Gail to return to class unharmed, but Gail did not return and Mr. Carlson never mentioned her. Rebecca stopped talking to Maria. Maria guessed she was angry with her for not coming to see her collection of Barbies, but she did not care. The inside of Maria's head was draped with the dark knowledge of what she had done.

“When Adam and Eve chose to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, they lost their innocence, and became sinners.” On Sunday Ms. Willow's voice was serene, and she wore a long, rose-colored skirt that swished, petal-like, past Maria and the other children seated on the floor in front of her.

“We call this Original Sin, and it is passed down to all of us, inherited, like a last name. We are all sinners, from birth.” Maria absorbed this knowledge with numb terror. She had somehow known it all along, that she was bad, that a seed of sin existed deep within her. If she looked past the pink folds of Ms. Willow's skirt, Maria could see the empty place in the Sunday School's nativity where St. Joseph had been.

Ms. Willow caught her eye and seemed to be speaking directly to her. “Everyone sins. It is a sin to disobey your parents. It is a sin to be mean to other children. Stealing is a sin. It is a sin to think bad thoughts. You know when you have committed a sin because it separates your heart from God, and you feel bad.”

After Sunday School Maria's parents said they had a surprise for her. Waiting in the backseat of their car was a heavy package, wrapped in glittery paper. Maria tore at the paper halfheartedly, knowledge of her own sinful nature making her nauseous. The package contained a deluxe set of oil pastels and a tablet of heavy drawing paper. Maria tried to look happy for her parents' sake, but she tumbled deeper and deeper down the hole inside her own heart, imagining the space between her and God growing larger and more black by the minute. She was beyond saving. She had prayed for her own art supplies and now she had them. She had prayed for Gail to go away, and now Gail was dead. On the drive home she took out one of the dark purple pastels and ground some of it into the beige carpeting on the floorboard of her parents' car. Maria knew it was bad, and she would probably be punished when her mother or father noticed the stain. She couldn't help herself, she was by nature a bad and sinful girl.

Susan Tekulve

FOLLOWING THE SLOW BLACK RIVER

*"Make of a nation what you will
make of the past
what you can"*

—"Anna Liffey" by Eavan Boland

The morning we arrived in Dublin, my husband, son and I stepped into the central atrium of the Guinness Storehouse, a room shaped like the largest pint glass in the world. We stood in the middle of a holographic stout surging down the seven-story glass walls. The smell of hops wafted in, familiar and welcoming, like the smell of boiled peanuts sold at farmers markets back home in South Carolina. It was like standing inside a soundless, brown waterfall that churned and settled into the color of dark rubies mined from the center of the earth.

This was in late June, a week after Bloomsday, the holiday when Dubliners celebrate James Joyce by making a day-long pilgrimage along the Ulysses route through the city. Others marathon read the entire 783-page novel aloud in the pubs while drinking stout for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. On the plane over, I'd reread my favorite Joyce story, "The Dead," tracing the melancholy steps of Gabriel Conroy and his wife, Gretta, as they leave Gabriel's aunts' house on 15 Ushers Island and walk the length of the River Liffey. Having never been to Ireland, I'd planned to undertake a more modest odyssey than the Bloomsday pilgrims had taken the week before: On our first day in Ireland, my family and I would follow the slow-black tidal river, crossing the Liffey bridges, stopping for lunch in one of the historic pubs. There, my husband, Rick, and I would share a pint of the "black stuff" with our son, Hunter, while listening to the Irish musicians. Hunter was heading off to study music at Belmont University in Nashville the following year. Our first visit to Ireland would be our last trip with our son before he left for college, and began his adult life apart from us.

We'd arrived in Ireland during those rare dawn hours when the pubs close down after last call, before they reopen for breakfast. From the window of our Cork Street flat, I couldn't see the River Liffey nor could I hear any pub music. Cork Street lies silently between the Guinness Storehouse at Saint James Gate and Saint Patrick's Cathedral, in a neighborhood called "The Liberties," named so because the weavers and Huguenot refugees who first lived here were free of city taxes as well as protection from the Irish police. This was Jonathan Swift territory, where he famously threw Bibles at his impoverished parishioners who

slipped through his sermons and championed the rights of the most savage poor of Ireland.

The Liberties is a hardy walking distance from the historic center and the River Liffey. It was, and remains, the least elegant district of Dublin. From our flat's front window, all I could see were Neil Diamond concert posters peeling from the concrete foundations of iron-gated shops across the street from our flat. A lone Georgian building that once housed aging single women with no children to support them, the poorest of the poor, hunched on the street's only grassy lawn.

Just as my plans of following the River Liffey grew distant and unrealistic, Rick summoned me over to the back bedroom window and pointed to the view of the Guinness Storehouse. A brown brick column topped with a glass rotunda, the old factory rose above the brewers' village like a giant pint of stout with a green, glass head. The frail Irish sun rolled above the Wicklow Mountains behind the rotunda, backlighting it. I opened the window. Seagulls keened from the unseen Irish Sea. The homey opiate of hops wafted in. I imagined a newly-poured glass of this black beverage. I could almost taste its coffee and chocolate flavor hinting of iron, that creamy head on top. I felt a giddy nostalgia for Guinness stout. Though I'm not much of a drinker, especially while jet lagged at dawn, I began having a strange and urgent thirst for a morning pint. Guinness was my only craving while pregnant with Hunter. It was the first beverage I drank after I stopped nursing him. Wouldn't it be poetic justice to take him to the birthplace of Guinness before we sent him off into adulthood?

As I formed this new plan, I looked over at Hunter. He was sprawled on one of the beds behind me, sinking into sleep, his calloused fingers twitching, most likely playing his beloved bass guitar in his dreams. Rick sat on the other bed, checking the bus schedule for the city center. I began campaigning to take a shorter walk over to the brewery at Saint James Gate. I grounded my claim with the fact that the Irish drink stout for breakfast, sometimes in their coffee, believing it full of iron and other nutrients. The staff members of Irish hospitals have been known to administer a pint to new mothers after they give birth in order to restore their strength.

"Guinness is like mother's milk over here," I said. "Drinking a morning pint would be like having a breakfast milkshake, chock full of local vitamins." I read aloud from the Guinness pamphlet our landlady had left for us in the flat's kitchen. I ticked off my closing arguments.

"It says here that you can spot Trinity College, Saint Patrick's Cathedral, and the Wicklow Mountains all from the Gravity Bar at the top of the Storehouse. This will be much better than any bus tour. And you get a free pint with your ticket."

Rick looked up from his bus map. "It's kind of early."

“It says that it’s best to go in the morning,” I said. “This way, we’ll beat the crowds.”

Hunter opened one eye and sat up. “Can I drink a Guinness? I researched the drinking age in Ireland on the Internet. I think it’s a lot like France over here. You have to be eighteen to buy alcohol, but it’s okay to drink a little if you’re with your parents.”

Rick and I looked at our seventeen-year-old son; neither of us had thought to research the drinking age in Ireland. Though we’d agreed to let him drink a stout while we were here with him, we hadn’t planned on giving him a pint for breakfast.

I nodded carefully. “It’s okay with me as long as it’s okay with your father. Let’s see what they say when we get there.”

Standing inside the central atrium of the Guinness factory, beer surging slowly around me, I felt less urgent about making this final family trip turn out right for all of us. The Storehouse is a dark museum whose halls spiral up and around the giant pint glass at its center, its exhibits brightly lit so that you remain completely immersed in the story of Guinness, which begins with displays of its four “magic” ingredients—barley, hops, yeast, and water. We walked slowly, stopping to read every word on the narrative panels. We even sampled the barley spread over the top of a beer cask. Raked and handled by thousands of strangers before us, the slender grains tasted vaguely of roasted coffee beans.

We approached a second surge of holographic water encased in glass, its currents emulating the “precious” water source of Guinness that trickled out of a peat bog up in the Wicklow Mountains. I began to feel lousy with mother guilt, as full of trickery as the holographic image before me. When I’d arrived at the Storehouse entrance and bought our tickets for the tour, I’d confessed to the ticket agent that my son was only seventeen, and she’d given me the family discount. Then she’d given Hunter a ticket stamped with the word “CHILD.”

Hunter stood beside me, already two inches taller, dressed like the Nashville sessions man he was bent on becoming, wearing black jeans, cowboy boots, a black t-shirt with a Fender guitar on it. An overnight flight’s growth of dark whiskers shadowed his pale face, his boyish features chiseled into those of a man without my noticing. His eyes followed the German and Scottish backpackers rushing by us, students just a few years older than him, who were ascending toward the Gravity Bar at the top, that green glass rotunda where they could view all of Dublin while drinking the free pint of stout that came with the cost of their ADULT tickets.

I began thinking of ways to distract my son, prolonging his inevitable disappointment. I pointed to a display called “The Art of Smelling,” which read that the brewery employed coopers with good noses whose job was to sniff out

foul-smelling casks unfit for reuse. If a cooper “lost his touch,” he was demoted back to his regular job in the cooperage. As long as he didn’t lose his sense of smell, the senior cooper could go on sniffing beer casks into his retirement until the day he died.

I nudged Hunter over to the display. “When they got really old, they would have the casks lifted to their noses by a couple of young apprentices. How would you like a job like that?”

No response. Hunter’s dark eyes drifted past the modes of transportation exhibits, the trains and ships that would have enthralled him just a few years before. I followed his glance towards the Tasting Room sign. My stomach clenched, sinking as I lingered beside a German torpedo that sank one of the Guinness ships in World War I.

“Look at this,” I said. “The barrels of stout on board fought their way through the hatches, keeping the ship afloat so that eight surviving members of the crew could get out. The cook said it was the barrels of beer that saved their lives.”

“Of all the rooms that say stuff, this is not my favorite,” Hunter said mildly.

“What’s your favorite room?”

“I liked the ingredient part.” He glanced toward the tasting room again.

“About that pint of Guinness—” I said.

“I’ll take care of it,” Rick said.

“How are you going to take care of it?” I felt my voice tighten, though I was really mad at myself, for being cheap, for breaking my promise. “I couldn’t lie about his age,” I whispered. “Did you want me to lie about his age? No, it’s my fault. I’ll take care of this.”

Taking the stairs leading to the tasting room two at a time, I sidled up to the bar and grabbed three sample glasses shaped like miniature pints. When Rick and Hunter entered the room, I handed them each a sample. Hunter held his glass like an expert and took a long pull, as if he’d been drinking Guinness stout all his life. A slow smile blossomed across his face, and his features softened, becoming boyish again. “It *is* just like a morning milkshake,” he said. My stomach unclenched with relief. I hadn’t broken my promise, not entirely. My son had gotten a taste, if not a full pint.

The tour ended in the “pour your own perfect pint” room, where Rick and I were lined behind a bar and given a clean stout glass with the iconic minstrel harp on it. We were instructed to tip our glasses at a forty-five degree angle, aiming the tap toward the harp on the glass. When the stout reached the bottom of the harp, we tilted our glasses upward. We flipped off the tap and watched the surge, that famous mingling of air and liquid, the separation of black beer from the creamy head. As we topped off our pints, our pouring instructor cheered,

“Perfect!” Holding his CHILD ticket, Hunter stood on the other side of the bar, behind the red line that separated the children from the adults. Broad shouldered and thin waisted, he looked like a fully-grown man standing among the eight, nine and ten-year-olds who also held CHILD-stamped tickets. I felt another pang of guilt as he snapped a photograph of Rick and me holding our perfect pints. In that photo, my left eye looks bruised, as if I’d been brawling with a ghost.

At the exit, we emerged out of the museum, blinking into Dublin daylight, a foam of yellow clouds blanketing the Irish summer sun. As we walked toward the city center, I felt vaguely relieved to be out of that dark, glass-paneled building, breathing open air. I returned to my original plan of walking the length of the River Liffey, visiting the haunts of James Joyce and his characters. After that pint of morning Guinness, I didn’t need to coax Rick to head toward the pub district for lunch. I suggested that we walk down to the river to eat in one of the historic taverns, listen to some traditional Irish music.

We followed a street shaped like a key that led into the city center. Passing St. Patrick’s Cathedral and Christ Church, we moved into Temple Bar, a cobbled neighborhood above the banks of the Liffey, filled with street musicians and historic pubs. We passed a tavern brimming with a victorious rugby team singing Neil Diamond’s “Forever in Blue Jeans,” men in gray jerseys spilling out the door to smoke and finish their pints in the streets.

We walked on. Beside the river, I discovered that we’d missed Usher’s Quay and the Joyce House by several bridges. We crossed Merchant’s Bridge and stood in the middle, where Joyce began *Finnegan’s Wake* in mid-sentence, “riverrun, past Eve and Adam’s, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of re-circulation back to Howth Castle and environs.” Disappointed in the surrounding environs, I realized that we’d started Gabriel and Gretta Conroy’s famous journey in the middle rather than at the beginning. I looked down at the river. The tide was out, the black water so low I could see the bottom in places, emerald moss softening its high, dry walls. Lanky seagulls looted a three-wheeled grocery cart sinking into the muddy bottom of the once-commodious river.

The rugby team flowed towards us, a sea of gray jerseys, their voices embracing “Love on the Rocks” as whole-heartedly as they would any Irish dirge. Before they overtook the bridge, I snapped a quick photo of a bridge lantern, its base shaped like a mythological creature, half mermaid, half horse. It occurred to me that Joyce had left his “dear dirty Dublin” when he was only twenty-two because he found it unbearable. He had, in fact, written most of his books while in exile, recreating his hometown from memory and the letters of relatives who’d remained. This fabled city from Joyce’s stories had all but disappeared. Still, I tried to rebuild it by imagining Joyce’s characters, Gabriel and Gretta,

walking the banks of this river at midnight during a snowfall, Gabriel brooding the loss of a different bygone era, his sorrowful wife walking slightly ahead, elusive as a shadow while she mourned her childhood romance with a boy from her village who'd loved her so much he'd stood below her window in the rain the night before she moved to convent school in Dublin. Within a year, he died of consumption.

A cloud swept in from the Irish Sea, chilling the gulf-stream breeze that had warmed the air a minute before. I looked over at my son and shivered. His fair skin had turned a diaphanous white. His fatigued face looked like a death mask. Rick gave me a tired look, "Where are you going?"

I had no idea where I was going, so I tried a feeble joke. "The way to travel is to be like a meandering stream that wanders down to the ocean," I said. "This way, you don't miss anything."

Rick said he wasn't a stream when he traveled. "I don't know what kind of traveler I am, but I can tell you what I am not," he said. "I'm not the kind who thinks about the philosophy of his traveling while he's on a trip."

"I feel like I'm missing something," Hunter said.

"Me, too," I said.

"No, I think we've missed it," he said. "As in, M-I-S-S, missing."

"I know," I said, understanding him perfectly.

My blood coursed with that morning pint of Guinness. I felt languid and remote, no closer to knowing Ireland than I had before my arrival that morning, and farther away from giving my son a decent send off into his adult life. Seagulls argued over dead fish lying belly up in the brackish water beneath the bridge. The rugby team crowded around us, still singing, "Love on the rocks. Ain't no surprise. Just pour me a drink. And I'll tell you some lies."

So far, I'd lied to my son at the Guinness Storehouse, giving him a child's portion instead of an adult pint. I'd missed most of Joyce's famous walk along the River Liffey. But surely we hadn't missed Ireland entirely. Was my son right? Had we missed it?

We trudged against the current of rugby players, back into Temple Bar. A crowd had gathered before three musicians, and the main street was solid with listeners. The musicians were young men, barely older than Hunter, playing blues music on a mandolin and an Irish drum. The bassist played a guitar made out of an old petrol can. Hunter stopped before the band, tilting his head. I knew he was listening to the bass player as a writer reads a book, studying the language and structure of music, determining how the Irish bassist anchored the harmony, laid down the beat.

A young gypsy jumped out of the crowd. Shirtless and barefoot, he danced an unschooled jig before the musicians. The crowd cheered at first, but the boy danced for too long, without knowledge or regard for the music, until the band

stopped, most likely fearing pickpockets working the street as the boy diverted the crowd's attention. Rick and I glanced at each other. I checked my purse. He checked his wallet. The crowd remained still, waiting in silence for the lovely music to begin again. But it was all over. As Rick and I pressed through the stunned crowd, Hunter dug into his pocket and fished out some change. He ran and dropped his coins into the open guitar case lying on the ground before the musicians. He returned to us, his sleepy eyes alive, excited, and I knew he'd found what he'd been missing.

In June, the sun sets in Dublin after 10 p.m. Rick and Hunter fell asleep well before sunset, and I followed them soon after. But I awoke at midnight, feeling the eerie jet-lag clarity that often comes to me in the middle of the night, in the middle of a foreign country. I'd been warned that Ireland had changed in the last two decades, that Dublin had become unrecognizably "modern," its old-world charm scarred by the Celtic Tiger, an economic boom time that clawed through the country in the mid-1990s. We'd arrived on the tail end of this movement, the week of the savage street riots in Greece, when it was rumored that the Irish economy would be the next to fall into crisis.

In theory, I understood that Ireland's prosperity had erased many aspects of its past. I also suspected that its impending economic crisis would change its present identity. At this moment, Dublin seemed in quiet flux, neither old nor young. Still, I didn't want to believe I'd missed seeing it entirely, whatever it was.

I thought it might be better to read the poetry of a living Irish writer more acquainted with this new and changing Ireland. In the morning, we'd be taking a coach tour of the Wicklow Mountains. I was looking forward to seeing the source of the River Liffey, that "precious" stream that trickled out of an ancient peat bog. I'd stuffed a volume of Eavan Boland's poetry into my luggage at the last minute. I took out this book, opened it to Boland's poem about "Anna Liffey," the Celtic goddess the river is named after. Set near Boland's home at the base of the Wicklow Mountains, near the headwaters of the Liffey, the poem contemplates the flow of the river and the course of the poet's body passing into middle age. I read: "I am sure/The body of an ageing woman/Is a memory."

Outside the window, street lamps yellowed the dark leaves of trees lining Cork Street. Seagulls shrilled from the Irish Sea. Quieter and more distant in the darkness, they sounded like the memory of lost children. Beyond the light of the street lamps, the Georgian hospital that once housed aging single women sat back from the street, looking empty, outcast among the strips of characterless shops and flats. A friend once told me that the very definition of a mother is one who is left behind. Feeling a kindred void with that empty Georgian building, I filled myself with more of Boland's poetry: "Consider rivers. / They are always

en route to / Their own nothingness. From the first moment / They are going home. / And so / when language cannot do it for us, / cannot make us know love will not diminish us, / there are these phrases of the ocean / to console us.”

At this raw hour, I felt reaffirmed by the poet’s words. My earlier joke about traveling like a stream no longer seemed ridiculous. Here was an Irish poet saying that a woman was a stream that meandered. She was a life source en route to nothingness, her role no longer clearly defined as she discovered her children grown, naturally moving away from her at bewildering speed. Standing in Temple Bar that afternoon, listening to the street musicians, I had felt old and foolish for believing I could rebuild the historic city in my mind, as Joyce had memorialized it with words. Old Dublin was gone, and I’d felt the loss of it. But there was Hunter standing beside me, listening to the street musicians, his knowing fingers moving fluidly, plucking an invisible bass in perfect sync with the Irish bassist. Happily rapt in the musicians’ blues, my son clearly understood the language of loss, but for him Ireland had been rebuilt through a single guitarist who made music out of an old petrol can. My son’s ease with the foreign country he’d just entered had seemed uncanny, and comforting. After the music ended, he’d led the way out of the city center, somehow knowing the streets without knowing their names. Guided only by the spire of Saint Patrick’s Cathedral, he’d led us back to our temporary home on Cork Street.

The next morning, the weather forecast predicted “warm, dry, risk of rain.” This was “good” Irish weather, we were told by our guide as we stepped onto the tour coach headed for the Wicklow Mountains. A tall, ruddy Dublin native in his early sixties, our guide asked us to please call him “Young Dave.” He called Hunter “Young Dog.” Nobody on the bus but my family seemed to have a ticket for the tour, or to speak English, or to be on the right bus at all. Young Dave invited everyone—English and non-English speakers—to stay on board, saying, “No matter, get on the bus, we’ll settle up later.” I immediately liked this about him, and I anticipated more of this famous Irish hospitality.

Young Dave began the tour with an account of his day off. “Oh, mummy, it was a craicin’ time at the barbecue yesterday. Me mates and I had so many pints of the black stuff that when the fire went out, all we had to do was blow on it, and it lit back up.” Then, as if remembering his microphone were on, he said, “When I say craic I mean having a conversation. Speak to me. I am here for ye. Whisper in me ear, and I will tell you tings.”

He drove us along the Liffey, past Trinity College and up Nassau Street, pointing out the house where James Joyce met Nora Barnacle, his wife and muse. On our way out of the city, we took a turn into District 4, the most affluent neighborhood in Dublin, where bright branches of monkey puzzle trees swooped, brushing the tops of stone walls surrounding sprawling mansions,

many of them empty. Young Dave pointed out each empty mansion, asking us to guess its going price.

“Ireland is broke,” he announced. “A few years ago, we were the second richest country in Europe, just beneath the Netherlands. Now we’re the poorest country, just above Greece. It used to be, you couldn’t get a loan. Then the banks began giving away money to anyone who walked in the doors. Now why do you suppose they did that?” he asked, looking truly puzzled. “All of me mates went out and bought cars. Now, they’re all having to give them back.” Then, as if to prove his point, Young Dave stopped the bus to give a ride to one of his car-less mates.

After spending an hour in the district of abandoned mansions, we drove up Brewery Road, where the government had opened a drying-out facility that was overpopulated by those driven to drink by the misfortunes of the recession.

“Imagine,” Young Dave mused. “An Irishman with a drinking problem.”

I was fairly certain that the abandoned mansion tour, the account of Ireland’s financial collapse, and the trip up Brewery Road past the new drying-out facility were not part of the original trip. The bus stopped abruptly, and our guide interrupted his ambling conversation to curse another driver. “Bloody feckin’ hell. Get out of me way or I’ll skin ye alive.” As we passed out of town and onto the Military Way, heading into Glencree, Young Dave stopped his talk of money and paused the bus to let a tinker wagon pass before him. His voice softening, he spoke gently to the tinkers, “Go on, me darlin’s. Ye have the right of way.”

Jolted awake by our guide’s cursing and sudden mood swing, I didn’t think his tour at all resembled the trip pitched at the Dublin Tourist Center, where I’d bought our tickets the day before. In fact, we’d been on the bus for at least two hours, and we hadn’t yet reached the beginning of our itinerary. By now we were supposed to be winding through the mountains and glens south of Dublin, that famously green Irish countryside. I didn’t mind. I was enjoying this tour guide’s makeshift tour, his seeming aversion to all tourist routes and destinations, his dashing accent. Though he played up his stage Irish, his savage mood swings seemed real and unplanned. His moodiness made a dark poetic sense, his character perfectly attuned to the Irish weather and the wild countryside we were entering. Warm, dry, with a risk of rain.

Along the Military Way, the wilderness thinned. The Glencree Oaks were all destroyed by climate, or collapsed into the peat bogs. There was a strange absence of the notorious sheep that once crowded the country roads. Only white cattle grazed inside wire and neat hedges. The Great Sugar Loaf Mountain rose on our left, still beautiful, its rocky peak sloping into patches of bright-green

pastures and belts of dark pines. Purple rhododendron blossoms flamed among the many hues of green.

We stopped beside a peat bog and unloaded in the middle of the highway to view the hand-cut turf standing on end, leaning into each other, each one a tiny brown and black monolith. Bog cotton flickered like stars against the gouged brown earth and green moor grasses, making it easy to imagine ancient Celtic kings appeasing their gods and other spirits by throwing human sacrifices, kegs of butter, jewels they hoped never to recover into the bogs.

When the bus sidled up beside the headwaters of the Liffey, I nearly missed them. The river's source wasn't much to look at, just an oozing tear in the brown earth stitched by chunks of gray limestone down a green slope. Young Dave didn't even stop to get off the bus at the headwaters. The source sprang from moving bogs filled with hollows, the ground around it as unstable as a sponge. He drove on to drier ground, stopping on a bridge that arched over a rocky stream spiked with yellow asphodel. We were somewhere in the Sally Gap, not at any itinerary site, but our guide thought the view beautiful, and that we should take the time to admire it while the weather was so fine. He gently commanded us to get off the bus and led us up the slope, handing us over the rocks in the stream. The heather wasn't blooming yet. All around us, it rose in brown mounds among the bright green ferns and stones.

"Imagine what this will look like in a week," Rick said. "When all this heather is blooming."

Rick and Hunter went below the bridge to search for heather blossoms while I hopped from stone to stone in the stream, settling on a long, flat one. Framed by the ancient bridge that arched between us, Hunter looked like a boy again in the distance, sitting cross-legged on a stone, calmly watching the currents shift and mingle around him. Our guide had stopped speaking, allowing us to linger inside this perfect water and soak in this quiet, poetic vista. A cloud swept over, spitting a few raindrops into my eyes. The sun continued to shine. I drug my hand in the water where it widened, becoming clear. My thoughts became spacious. Finally, I thought. This is Ireland. We didn't miss it.

After we returned from our trip, when I asked Hunter what he loved the most about Ireland, he picked up his second-hand mandolin and filled our entire house with the sound of Celtic dirges he'd overheard and memorized on the streets of Dublin, beside the River Liffey. Once, before leaving for college, he allowed me to record his playing so that I could listen to him after he was gone. Now, when the house feels unnaturally quiet without him in it, I sometimes turn on this recording. As the mandolin's voice fills the dissonant rooms of our house, I reassure myself that music, rather than words, will help him navigate his way safely into adulthood. As I sat silently inside that unnamed Wicklow

stream, dragging my hand through the ancient waters, I was no longer conscious that I was beside the river's source, the beginning of the entire country. I closed my eyes, listening to the voices of my son and my husband in the distance as they rock hopped, hunting for heather just beginning to bloom. After a while, when I walked down to meet them, Rick and Hunter each placed a heather blossom into my palm. I held them like jewels recovered from the bogs.

Sonja Livingston

ROSALIE, FROM THE PHILIPPINES

They are twins, the girls in my class. One of them blonde, the other brunette, faces pointed at the chin, bony noses, oversized eyes. One is named Laverne or has a name close to Laverne—Lavinda or Lavonne. But to me, she is Laverne, and it's nothing short of cruelty that her dark-haired sister is not named Shirley, is not named at all, in fact, is nothing but a shadow, a head-nodder to the other girl, lodged forever in memory as wrongly named twin to Laverne.

Both sport choppy shags, and with the shortish hair and angled faces, they look a bit like boys. The girls wear matching outfits—which is not so unusual really, matching clothes are to be expected with twins—but the outfits themselves are odd. One-piece coveralls like racecar drivers wear, jumpsuits studded with shoulder stripes and patches bearing the names of tires and motor oil. Only the color of their jumpsuits differ, and Laverne in the orange stands close to me, her sister in blue at her sleeve.

How strange these sisters, dressed like mechanics or pit stop workers, but then, what isn't strange? I'm the new girl, and as the other children file out the door to line up for another class, music or art, the sisters crowd me near the coat closet, asking what school I came from and instructing me in the ways of the classroom while I listen, eyes wide, trying to make sense of every last thing. *You put your papers here. Monday is music day. Akron, as in Ohio?*

Somewhere inside the closet, another child ruffles through her things, the sound of papers and zippers shuffling in the background. Laverne rolls her eyes when she sees me notice the girl in the pale yellow dress.

"That's just Rosalie," she says, lowering her voice as the girl passes, "she's from the Philippines."

"We don't talk to her," Shirley chimes in, delighted to contribute, "She's so ugly."

I look again at the girl who has just left the coat closet, and it's as if someone has taken up the classroom globe and spun it, all of us lurching inside the circle of it, reaching for the hollow places under the cardboard ocean. I'd lived on a reservation near Buffalo before coming to this school, with kids whose skin was the same soft brown as Rosalie's; a place where girls who looked like her were the best any of us could hope for, a place where pale skin was pitied, light hair considered unfortunate. Except for her starched dress and the kinky bends of her hair, which Seneca girls would die for, she is so like kids I'd left just days before that I nearly follow her as she steps out into the hall. But no, I

don't follow. Instead, I wait with the jump-suited sisters, wondering if I'd heard wrong.

"What?" I mumble, "What did you say?"

The teacher's voice cuts into my question and sends the three of us skittering into the hall where the rest of the class waits. I take my place behind Rosalie in the line of black and white faces, wondering if there's something special about the Philippines, something I'm supposed to know. I stare into the swath of dark hair and think again of the reservation, the way we'd left without warning, the toys and clothes and old photographs abandoned when we packed into the car that day—anything that wouldn't fit between elbows and knees—everything left near a field of sedge and milkweed—I think of this and the way things come and go, the way nothing stands still for very long. I look at the back of Rosalie's head, seeing in it my favorite sister's black hair, and I think of prettiness, I suppose, and ugliness too, what the words mean, how quickly the definitions can change.

She turns around then, Rosalie, and gives a small smile and I return it, and it's almost a tender moment, except that she's not there the following day or the following week, and in any case, all trace of her disappears before I have a chance to make friends.

"Back to the Philippines probably," Laverne says when I ask during lunch, "and no one misses her," she adds, jutting the ridge of her chin toward the table, showing us where to sit. I'm not asked for my opinion, and do not give it. I cannot bring myself to speak. I would like to shout or even whisper that I know something about beauty. I would like to take my tray of food and move to the empty end of the table. I would like to swell to the ceiling and hover far above the cafeteria, float out of the school, and sweep the entire length of the city until I found Rosalie in her pale yellow dress and let myself fall from the sky and sit beside her, the two of us sharing a book.

Instead, I keep quiet while starting in on my lunch, and learn firsthand what happens to words not said in third grade, the way they stay with you, the weight of them doubling with the years, so that, at times, I find myself caught inside the memory of Laverne and Shirley and Rosalie, as if thirty years have not come and gone. I'm there, in the third grade cafeteria, wedged between the sisters and their matching plastic lunchboxes, chewing back words most in need of speaking, while all around me, a new world slides into place.

Stephanie Barton

THE ART OF GIVING

I am not the kind of woman who buys a man a tie for his birthday. I am the kind of woman who spends weeks or even months hunting down an unexpected and yet appropriate gift, and I expect my husband Lee to reciprocate in kind. The problem is, he doesn't get behind the gift-giving initiative like I do. Not in the least.

The talent for gift-giving is not bestowed on everyone. When people parrot the old line, *it's the thought that counts*, they're saying a thoughtful gift shows the time, energy, and even inconvenience spent rather than the money. A gift reflects a relationship, and not all relationships rise to gift-giving status. I don't bake cookies for my postal carrier and I don't buy cheap dog toys for the people I chat with in the park. Gifts are meant for special occasions, for special people. And I'll admit it: I get my own reward when I spend all that time hunting down my prey and then releasing it back into the wild on a holiday. I am stroking my own ego. I look forward to the moment Lee unwraps the professional bike maintenance kit I hid for two months with the cleaning supplies (because he'd never stumble on it in there), the moment he turns to me with awe. A wicked smile of superiority stretches across my face.

Lee argues that prescribed gifts are silly, and scrambling around for the right one causes unnecessary stress that nobody needs in their already hectic lives. But I don't see the search as stressful: I like the hunt. And maybe that's the difference. I'm never scrambling; I'm never in a panic, racing around to shops before they close or hoping the local grocery store has something I can pass off as a present. I study my husband, listen to his grumblings and watch him linger over items at High Desert Bicycle or Williams-Sonoma. I wait, and when he's not around I pounce, drag my kill home, and bury it in a closet.

He also insists that if you see something a loved one might like, you should buy it and give it to them immediately—why wait for holidays and birthdays, which are contrived celebrations? He cites his good deeds with me as examples: “Don't you like when I come home with flowers or cookies out of the blue? Isn't that better than waiting around for a holiday?” He wants credit for being spontaneous and romantic. While I agree that those moments are lovely, I suspect he's just giving in to inertia, giving up on finding and hiding a gift for whatever holiday is coming up next. Also, sometimes when he comes home loaded with flowers or a cheesecake, it's because he's pissed me off the

day before. His gift is tactical: a strategy as well planned as my holiday gifts, executed with more speed but with the same self-serving purpose. He won't apologize, but he'll bring me some exotic plant and say, "It was really pretty. I thought it would make you happy. Look, even the pot is pretty." All is forgiven. And he knows it.

Lee claims that the prospect of hunting for a gift—of setting it aside, and then remembering that he bought it in the first place, and then where he hid it—is a miserable and exhausting cycle. That "miserable" cycle is exactly what I love. The hiding and the remembering and the finding again, it all adds to the thrill. You've paid attention, done your homework, taken mental notes, and you'll earn high marks for your efforts at the final exam, which absolutely must be a big event, like a birthday or Christmas or at least Mother's Day. It can't just be any old day. You get a little flicker of excitement each time you drop a hint. It's an imaginary drama that is completely harmless and silly, especially because in this drama everything works out great in the end. Someone gets a present and that rocks.

I haven't been able to transmit any of my enthusiasm to Lee; he doesn't get much more excited about getting gifts than he does giving them. My perfect gifts may amuse him—he may even be mildly impressed when I give him a crate of barbeque sauce from every state in the South—but he doesn't appreciate them any more than when I come home with a bag of chips from the supermarket.

Lee will produce the requisite presents on calendar-prescribed dates, but he does it grudgingly. For the three years we lived in Texas, he gave me pajamas for my birthday, our anniversary, Christmas, and Valentine's Day. I had pajamas with cakes, hearts, snowflakes, cookies, ducks, cherries, and polka dots. I had silk ones and cotton ones and flannel ones, short ones and long. He felt he was sending just the right message: he wanted me to be warm and happy when I climbed into bed, and to think of him if he happened to be out of town.

Lee doesn't just gripe about gifts, though, he gripes about holidays in general, claiming they are manufactured events to promote corporate interests. That's right, he thinks every holiday is too commercial. Not just Christmas, but Halloween and the Fourth of July and probably Arbor Day, too, because if we really celebrated Arbor Day right we'd all have to go out and buy a tree.

For Lee, the only legitimate holiday is his favorite, Thanksgiving, because it's the only one that doesn't revolve around buying useless stuff. It's about buying a basic necessity and nurturing the ones you hold dear. As he sees it, you have to buy food anyway, so Thanksgiving doesn't fall under the guise of a commercial enterprise. Thanksgiving does involve me cooking for two days—whether we have guests or not. To Lee my efforts are a more honest display and

celebration of love than anything I could ever buy. I suppose his appreciation for my cooking is my reward. (Actually, it is. I get the same sense of anticipation and excitement folding apples and cranberries into stuffing as I do wrapping a present.)

I've pointed out to Lee that New Year's Eve has nothing to do with gifts, either. But he claims it isn't legit because you must buy champagne—a drink you don't normally consume unless you have a Sunday morning mimosa habit—and you stay up too late with people wearing silly hats. To Lee, Thanksgiving is about food and family, although he prefers when the holiday is just about food and him and me.

Finally my favorite holiday, Halloween, fails Lee's True Holiday Test because we are obligated to give gifts of candy to strange children. He doesn't see any benefit in that activity. We don't have kids of our own, we don't particularly like kids, and we get nothing in return. But I look forward to seeing the wacky costumes people throw together. I'm willing to suffer the tyranny of children banging on my front door and yelling at me just to see them stuffed into outlandish outfits.

The year Lee and I moved to Landstuhl, Germany, for his first official tour of duty with a military hospital, we were both thirty years old. He was finally out of residency and working as a staff physician. That Christmas I wanted to give him a relatively expensive gift, preferably something masculine and sophisticated. Not being masculine or all that sophisticated, I knew I'd need to recruit other people to help me find this present, especially with the Christmas markets that sprang up in every little German town, tempting me with crafts and cheeky items like lederhosen (really, they sold embroidered lederhosen for adults, and they were adorable).

I sought the help of male coworkers at the tiny magazine where I worked. I asked these guys not only because they were men but because they were not American, so they were bound to be more cultured than me. I polled the graphic designers from Quebec and Hong Kong, the business manager from Australia, the salty salesman, and finally the owner of the company. Those last two were American but had lived in Germany for more than a decade, so to my mind they qualified as urbane ex-pats and therefore sophisticated by association.

I asked these men what gift they had always wanted to see tucked under their Christmas tree, a gift a wife wouldn't think up on her own. I expected some chin scratching and peering up at the ceiling. I thought they might philosophize the way I would: *You have to know the man, know his tastes, know his story.* But I got none of that. Over lunch with the graphic designers, in a meeting with the business manager, on a drive with my boss, every man claimed he wanted a

good bottle of Scotch. It was a weirdly male answer. Who the hell wants a bottle of liquor for Christmas? There was no mystery to it, no romance, and I feared, no thought behind it all. I don't know what answer I was expecting—definitely something more costly than alcohol: a guitar, maybe, or a Swiss watch well out of my price range, or even a fancy cocktail shaker? But they all, and I mean *all*, said they wanted good Scotch.

I had to press further because I didn't know anything about Scotch—I'd spent the prior decade refining my knowledge of the grape on trips to California wine country. Now that I was living in Germany, I was just a mountain pass from the Mosel-Saar and its Rieslings, a few hours' drive to Champagne and Burgundy in France, and a hop, skip, and a flight to Piedmont Barolos and Tuscan Chiantis, so I fully planned to advance my oenological education. But I hadn't really exposed my palate to grain alcohol. I asked my coworkers what exactly made a good bottle of Scotch. I got two helpful answers.

The best response came from the Australian business manager, Adam, who looked like Bono and played guitar in a band with his girlfriend. He advised, "You have to go sample a lot of Scotch. When you find one that doesn't taste like gasoline, you've got yourself a good bottle of Scotch."

Though Adam's logic was sound, it wasn't prudent. I wasn't about to sit down alone with many tumblers of fuel-flavored drink in the weeks leading up to the holidays. Adam offered his services in this regard, saying "Let's go find one together! I know a bunch of places. We can write about it for the magazine." I was tempted because Adam and his girlfriend were fun, I could charge my travel and drinks to work, and I might learn something. But despite the appeal, I knew the husband would sulk if I went on an excursion like that without him. Lee had endured dozens of wine tastings to humor me, learning the meanings behind terms like *legs*, *bouquet*, and *finish*. (He refused to integrate these terms into our conversations at the dinner table; when I asked him what he thought of a bottle of wine, he'd grumble, "If you want me to drink wine with you, don't make me talk about it.") He had swirled wine with a smirk and a sigh all along the northern California coast, so that I could pick a bottle with better reasoning than "it has a cute label." He'd sipped through sweet, smoky, spicy, and fruity, and I could not hop around the bars of southern Germany knocking back drams without him and expect he wouldn't see it as a betrayal. So I had to turn down Adam's offer.

The owner of the publishing company, my boss, pointed me down a different path that was much easier to follow. He advised, "Just buy anything with Glen in the name that's at least eighteen years old." I didn't ask him about the logic behind his reasoning at the time, though I now know that *glen* refers to

the narrow valleys in Scotland. For years the most successful distilleries attached the prefix to the local river so fans of their particular poison could identify its origins. So it's a distinctly Scottish appellation, similar to how the moniker Champagne applies only to bubbly originating from the Champagne region of France. Except the Scots never thought to regulate the name. Now they've got a lawsuit in the works to bar a Canadian company from using Glen on their whisky labels. I also now know that a Scotch that has celebrated eighteen years is mature, the body has filled out a little, having mellowed in an oak cask through most of its aggressive adolescent years.

The little German towns in my region had an excellent crop of liquor stores, so I could easily hunt down an eighteen-year-old Glen. I settled on a bottle of Glenfiddich that set me back a solid Benjamin. The most I'd spent up on a bottle of wine was forty bucks, so I could only hope this Scotch wouldn't taste like it could power my car.

I worried about following the gifting advice of people who had never met my husband. A gift should be personal, it should have meaning and history, even better if it had a whole story attached to it. Like the graduation gifts my dad had given me. When I graduated high school, he presented me with a little velvet box, which contained a twin of the ring he had given my mother on their first anniversary: a white pearl and a black pearl, representing their interracial marriage. I wore that ring everywhere until a thief tried to steal it off my ring finger, then I moved it to the middle digit where it fit more snugly. But after I moved it, I couldn't remove it. The ring got stuck at my knuckle. Late in my senior year of college, I was working with printmaking acid baths for my art degree, and one of the pearls dissolved away (I had also managed to dissolve away my fingerprints, which was also troubling). The loss of the pearl broke my heart, and I went to a jeweler to cut the ruined ring off. My dad asked me to send him the broken ring, and at my college graduation he gave me a velvet box with two rings: the ruined original and its replacement, along with a tiny note in his fluid script that read, "Rings can be broken but love cannot." It was so fantastically cheesy and sweet that I couldn't bring myself to wear the new ring for years because I didn't want to lose it again.

My dad understood how to choose a gift for special occasions. He understood that such a gift was more than just a pretty object you purchased: a gift illustrated your bond with the recipient, your interest in and understanding of who they were. And that young women are dazzled by any kind of real jewelry.

A bottle of Scotch didn't fit any of my gifting requirements. It didn't send a message of love and understanding. The statement it seemed to make was

more like, “If you let me loose on the shops of London and Paris I may very well empty our bank account. Best you start drinking now.” I wanted a gift that said something more along the lines of, “Thank you for giving me the chance to travel the world with you.” But I had to trust the male intuition on this one (does such a thing exist?). Anyway, I was probably getting a pair of German pajamas that looked like lederhosen, so it might as well be a Christmas to forget.

When Lee opened the bottle of Scotch, he nodded at it, but he didn’t offer up the mild admiration I had come to expect. So I explained my methods—that this gift had come recommended. By other men. Lee pursed his lips in a gesture of token approval, but I could see that the Scotch had taken me down a notch.

Then he tried it. And he didn’t like it. There’s nothing like giving someone a gift that they don’t like and can’t use. And an opened bottle of hundred-dollar Scotch is not something you can return with a gift receipt.

Yet I think Lee was more disappointed in himself than he was in me; he was a little irked that he didn’t take to the whisky right away. Something to do with being a man’s man, and hair on the chest. He’d never drunk the stuff, but he knew it was desirable, valuable even, particularly after he went into work and his colleagues expressed wild approval, offering to take the bottle off his hands. He came home that night and instituted a training program, much the way someone sets up a workout regimen. Each night he sat at the dining room table and poured himself a finger of Scotch. He would sniff the stuff and swirl it around for a while, setting his jaw. Then he’d bring the rim of the glass to his lips, sip, frown, close his eyes and shake his head once. He repeated the steps for the next half hour until he drained the glass of that quarter-inch of liquor. He forced himself to appreciate the smoky nuance of what was essentially high-falutin’ moonshine.

I had found the perfect gift after all. He’d been a beer drinker, and Germany was the perfect place to gain expertise in pilsners, porters, lagers, and ales. We’d already started to get more proficient earlier in the year at Oktoberfest. But Scotch was the drink of a serious man. Scotch was a drink that required patience; it was a beverage poured for deliberating and discussing big questions. The kind of man who drank Scotch was the kind of man who could lecture his wife on the madness of holidays and hunting for perfect gifts.

I didn’t win the gifting campaign that day, though; he did. After he unwrapped the bottle of Scotch, he handed me a package that looked and felt like an oversized brick. He flashed a knowing, superior smile.

There is a book that I have read over and over since my freshman year of high school, a fantasy novel about King Arthur, told through the eyes of Arthur’s mother, sister, and wife. Every few years, I go back to the story, finding

comfort in familiar characters that I adore, like they are old friends. Each time I read this book I hope for different endings for my favorite characters even though I know what tragedy awaits them. I cry for them every time. I'd held onto the same dog-eared paperback copy of this book for fifteen years, since high school. Then I lent my copy to a friend, and she forgot to return it before I moved to Germany. I'd realized the book was missing in September, when our household goods arrived, and I'd moped as I set our other books on a shelf in our office.

Lee held the bottle of Scotch on his lap, watching me peel the wrapping paper away to reveal a heavy hardcover book. The linen finish showed the faint pearlescent image of a woman in ceremonial robes seated on a horse, her arm extended and her hand grasping a sword. I slid my fingers over the embossed figure and then along the deckle edges of the book's signatures.

I looked up at Lee and his face was beyond triumphant, the skin around his eyes crinkling deeply as he smiled. But he didn't gloat for long. He reached out to touch the book cover, asking simply, "It's your favorite, right? I did good?"

Fenton Johnson

LIGHT IN AUGUST

Every summer, toward the end of July a day arrives when I'm walking along in mid-afternoon and I realize the light has slipped. Its angle is no longer that of high summer, high and hammering—light that for the past couple of months I've come to take for granted, in my too-human fashion, as the way things will always be. Summer will never end. No one I love will ever die.

Now the angling light signals that the endless summer is ending. In fact I and everyone I love will die. The question is only who will be first to reach the finish line.

And yet I see I have indulged a commonplace misperception, since properly understood there is no finish line. We are creatures of light, sentient bundles of energy moving through the universe, it is of us as we are of it, there is no death, there is only process. Through some Cartesian sleight of hand the brain refuses to perceive this. Instead it cunningly divides the world into dualities. There's a little dab of brain, I'm told, given over to setting boundaries: This is where I end, this is where you begin—me/you, us/them, male/female, light/dark, beginning/end, life/death.

No doubt this illusion is or was necessary for our survival, no matter that it's the basis for murder and mayhem and our egocentric misunderstanding of death as now-you-see-us, now-you-don't. In fact death is only another milepost in the never-ending becoming of what is. Ask your dog—she'll agree; look to the wag in her tail. You don't see her moping about impending doom.

In this particular summer I noticed the slipping light on a walk rendered poignant by the tension of unrequited love. Denied an outlet for my passion, I offered my companion the observation that if I believed in death I'd kill myself. What do you mean? he asked, no doubt casting an uneasy glance at the penknife dangling from my knapsack. All that loss, I answered, all the going away, all the departed. Who could stand it, if he believed death to be the finish line? Not me. I take great affirmation and good cheer knowing we're light from light, true gods from true gods, one form of energy changing into another until billions of years hence when in the entropy of time all our colors will merge and melt into a uniformly still gray, the gray of the paintings that hang in the Rothko Chapel in Houston.

Some years back, under the auspices of *Harper's Magazine*, I moderated a debate held in that chapel. The subject at hand was faith and reason, as false a duality as light and dark or male and female or science and art or life and

death, but one thing had led to another and here we were, with the Pulitzer-winning novelist Marilynne Robinson representing faith and the Nobel-winning physicist Steven Weinberg representing reason and me wondering how I had gotten myself from the hollers of Kentucky into refereeing such (A)ugust company.

I chose the Rothko Chapel as our venue—a mistake. It features works by Mark Rothko, painted in the decade before he took his life in 1970—vast lozenges of a smooth, even gray surrounded by haloes of an almost indiscernibly darker gray hung against the lighter gray of the walls. Their enveloping gray stillness prompts not debate but meditation. They demand that we sit down, shut up, still ourselves to the essence of being, the unbearable gray light-ness of being.

Robinson burned with quiet passion. Weinberg might be the most articulate man with whom I have had the honor of conversing, as was evidenced in that day's debate, in which he, the combative empiricist, set forth the case for faith, then argued with himself while the contemplative Robinson listened.

But we're not yet at the debate, we've just walked into the chapel and are spending a moment looking at Rothko's paintings. Weinberg shook his head. "I love abstract art," he said. "But I just don't get Rothko. What is it with these great blobs of gray." The most delicate of pauses ensued before Robinson said quietly, "It's the moment before creation."

I would have been happy to have ended the debate right there, since to my mind the exchange said all that needed to be said about the debaters' different understandings of the way things are. In *The First Three Minutes* Weinberg wrote, "Even when physicists have gone as far as they can go . . . there seems to be an irreducible mystery that science will not eliminate." Robinson, the contemplative, grasped what he, the empiricist, had not perceived: Stories and art are our means of putting our hearts around the irreducible mystery. Rothko had painted that mystery, a few years before he plunged in.

Among the most brilliant of book titles is William Faulkner's *Light in August*—a novel contained in a phrase. "Memory believes before knowing remembers," Faulkner writes. "Believes longer than recollects, longer than knowing even wonders . . ." To write poetry or prose is to dwell in the realm of the believers, the people of faith.

Everything is always, as my friend Barry says, most especially us and most especially memory, and before you ask what he'd been smoking, take a walk at eventide in the light in August, the month of plenitude and of loss.

Donna McClanahan Crow

RED MOON RISING

At the end of an unusually warm day in the middle of February, I was enjoying the night sky when a red moon rose from behind a mountain across the river from my farm. First, it was only an orange glow just above the tree line in the distance. It looked like the electric skyline of a distant city, but there wasn't one. In this isolated location of woodland, field and river, my driveway is a half-mile from the one lane country road that is one mile from the two-lane county road that is two miles from the state highway that leads five miles to a brief stopover within "city limits" on the way to nowhere in particular but a beautiful place to be. The glow was so unusual I thought it might be a fire, but within minutes it rose into a full moon that could have been The Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown, larger than life.

Such is the magic and surprise of the natural world. I am always mesmerized by the moon, like it is my first time seeing it, every visible moon whether full or a thumbnail, but this red one held some power for me. I stood in the backyard, arms outstretched, grateful for the brief respite between cold spells, and that's when I felt it; a warm glow inside, like the one in the sky. I think it was love.

I'd been waiting for it a long time. Acceptance. For myself, for the way things are. The innate knowing I would be okay. I'd heard of it in my spiritual readings. Writers like Parker Palmer, a Quaker, and Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest, had also felt it, or at least searched for its rare occurrence. I'm talking about the love and acceptance of self as a part of the whole, no longer disconnected through distraction and fear. I'm talking about faith.

Spiritual teachers who see no line of demarcation in the true teachings of Buddha, Jesus and Ghandi, people who believe in the language of inclusion, not exclusion, had become my allies, my guides. They speak of the love we are all searching for to heal the wound of separation from our source; the ways in which we each go about trying to reconnect, through our ego identities, defending, denying, and grasping; harming ourselves and others in the process. I have been looking for my true self, unabashed, naked in the garden. Beneath the red moon, I was struck by the primal urge to dance.

Shape-shifting into my second adulthood must have looked like morphing into a werewolf to those who knew my prior compliant, people-pleasing self. It has taken a handful of years, six maybe, tears always just below the surface, ready to emerge, a permanent lump in my throat where my voice should have been. Sometimes I felt like a breached calf strangled by my own birthing process, afraid to move forward for hurting someone else, afraid to stay behind for suffocating.

Suzanne Braun Levine calls this life shift the “fuck-you-fifties,” a time when women who haven’t done so already break away from certain outside constructs and work toward an internal locus of control. In other words, we take back our power.

For me this began almost a decade ahead of my fifties—probably because I married almost a decade before I should have, and because my “outside constructs” were imbedded in concrete. I needed the extra time to prepare. My early struggles involved resentment and regret for choices I had not yet made. Angry at my lack of control I blamed those to whom I’d given my power, those who’d gladly taken it. Ralph, my husband, must have been intimidated by the changes he saw happening, but rather than admit it, he acted out in behaviors that proved too difficult to overcome. Someone once said the strongest and longest lasting marriages happen when two neuroses dovetail. I was barely more than a child when we met. He was older than me and I worshipped him. Call us Narcissus and Echo. A perfect fit, we were together over thirty years. My “awakening” to a spiritual path, toward healthy wholeness, toward independent thinking, toward authenticity, pulled me into a space where he was not comfortable. Try as I might, I could not get him to hear and respond to my new needs. Afraid not to answer “the call” but unable to coax him along or even into counseling, I mourned our losses. Reluctantly, I peeked through squinted eyes at ideas previously considered too dangerous. I was going to have to let go of who I’d been my whole adult life, in order to grow. It wasn’t always graceful.

Parker Palmer says letting go is like a little death and many of them have to happen to ready ourselves for the one big death. Each one is another chance, a chance, to go deeper into spirituality, away from ego, to acknowledge a higher source of love without attachment, God, if you will. One thing I have learned—if you don’t do it willingly, it will be done unto you. I have spent thousands of dollars in counseling and books trying to find a way to hold on. For three years, we had lived in that liminal space of confusion; he, wanting me to come back, my wanting him to move forward. Neither of us able. Unable to un-see what I had seen, I had to admit mine wasn’t my husband’s journey.

Dancing in the dark alone, I indulged in my divine feminine connection to the moon’s cycles like the howling coyote that share my land. Land that first belonged to my grandfather and then my father. Land that I am reclaiming, or more to the point, is reclaiming me.

Just two days before, the weather was barely above freezing. In the course of twenty-four hours it had risen to seventy degrees. I started out dressed, as usual, in layers, and spent the day peeling back off as I removed old growth from the flower beds. Then, I borrowed a truck to haul some unsightly junk to the dump

that was left behind when my parents moved closer to town for health reasons. The sun had opened a portal into spring for only a few hours and was about to close again for the last long days of winter. It was an opportunity I couldn't afford to miss and I stayed out all day, even until dark. The sun left its mark on my unprotected shoulders; the warmth like a promise of brighter days.

The glow of the red night sky bestowed a grace on me which felt like peace and gratefulness, despite the grief and uncertainty that had become so familiar. I wrapped myself in it until the moon rose high in the sky and then took that feeling to bed with me, like a security blanket. It is what I thought living in the moment could feel like, not mourning the past or fearing the future, but knowing that right now, at this very moment, I am not only okay, but the world is full of magic, if I'd only pay attention.

Drifting toward sleep, still wrapped in what felt like a benevolent grace, my arms began to tingle as if someone were stroking them lightly. The image of my deceased grandmother popped in my head. Maybe because I needed the comfort and conjured her up; or maybe she was there anyway, waiting for me to notice. By this time, I had long since stopped questioning the unexplainable and embraced the mystery. My grandmother died when I was six so she is not a recurring thought that lingers all the time. But, she has been a comforting one at certain times of stress. For some reason, wrapped in the thin veil of the night, I felt I could ask, "Is that you, Granny?" When I did, it was as if my skin became cheesecloth and some formless substance poured through me, leaving goose bumps over my entire body. She was with me. Whether real or imagined, I felt her presence, a guardian holding me close as I relaxed into sleep.

The next morning, the temperature started to plummet and a torrent of rain pelted down with it. The wind kicked up and pummeled the bird feeders I had just filled and kicked the porch swing against the outside wall of my living room. Though I rarely turn on the television, my daughter had called from work with a warning so I watched the straight line of storms that burned red across The Weather Channel and threatened tornadoes throughout the state. I hunkered down for the worst of it, listening to the rain on my tin roof. Cold weather would come after and bring snow. My hilly gravel driveway would freeze, rendering my car immobile. There would be a slight window of opportunity to prepare, so after the storms blew through, I checked on my aging parents, ran some errands and went to the grocery for the necessary items to be stranded for a few days.

My lifestyle has changed considerably since I've come to live on the farm, in the two story 110-year-old farmhouse. First of all, I have to be aware of the weather. Ralph and I had lived in town, about two blocks from a grocery. I knew what the weather was when I got up and looked out the window of our

Bedford Stone on Main Street. Even in the worst of it, our streets were cleared and we had access to the store. Taking that for granted, I used to make light of the long lines of people buying out all the milk and bread before a storm. Now, I'd become one of them, living in a place not easily accessed. Forced to look out for myself in all sorts of new ways, I made plans to leave my car inside the gate at the end of the road before it froze. Another thing that changed was the sense of peace that had come over me since I'd returned to this, my ancestral home place. Where I used to be unable to stay home, in need of a distraction, volunteering at church or working in a coffee shop just to be in the company of strangers, it felt good to make a pot of chili and write or read in front of the fireplace, at ease with myself. A sign of growth.

By the time I ran some errands and came home to unload my groceries, it was dark. I stopped by the mailbox on the way in and picked up my mail. There was a letter from my husband's lawyer saying his client was ready to proceed with the dissolution of our marriage. The Petition for Dissolution had already been filed by him, I thought as a bluff, back in October. I'd asked for an extension before making my response. With letter in hand, I sat in my car and remembered our last visit, at our daughter's wedding, in December. He was tired, he'd told me, of waiting. I was tired, I'd said, of hoping. We stood together, his left arm around my waist, my right hand crossing over to grasp his, even though papers had been filed. We held on tight while we watched our daughter, the same age as I was at our wedding, marry an older man. Our fingers interlaced, we cried all through the service. When we'd hugged goodbye, he'd said, "Can I see you again soon?" I'd said yes and we made plans. We spent a whole day together and it was good, but there were no conclusions. Now, this letter. I thought he should have called me, but I knew he hadn't so I wouldn't talk him out of it. He was ready to end it and he ceased communication completely, something I was unable to do.

Inside I felt like someone strapped into a bungee cord against her will. Pushed off the ledge with the admonition, "It's for your own good," and me clawing and scratching the air all the way down trying to climb back up the rubber band only to be snapped at the bottom like a dishrag and begin the whole process over again. With each snap, another letting go. Losing the safety net of the life I'd known was a nightmare of ups and downs that felt out of my control.

The moon was gone from my sight. Thick snow-filled clouds lay heavy at the treetops. Scores of deer littered my yard. I crept in slow as they jumped across the driveway in front of me in their hurried scatter. They were out every night in different numbers. One night, I got up to go to the bathroom at three a.m. and saw a shadow walk past my bathroom window. I was grateful to find a mama

and baby deer on my sidewalk eating from my flower bed. The neighboring farmers hunt game and own big dogs to patrol their livestock. My place has become a refuge. It feels arrogant to say I welcome the wildlife. I do, but more often the wild welcomes me.

After unloading the car, I zipped myself up in the Carharrrt coveralls every farm owner must have—mine are blue denim canvas with red quilted lining—and slipped into my version of gum boots, white with little pink and yellow flowers. I put a flashlight in one deep side pocket and a pistol in the other (because my dad insisted) and drove my Honda Civic to the top of the hill. Unlike the night before, when I danced and prayed to the red moon that lit up the star-filled sky in seventy-degree weather, all signs of light had disappeared.

“Aren’t you scared down there all by yourself?” people ask.

“No,” I say, “I’m not scared of the dark or wild animals though they’re everywhere. I’m more scared of having to get a real job.” I mean that. I am a relationship person. I take care of people, but I don’t report on a schedule. I do plenty, but not for pay. People think I’m brave living where I do. I don’t feel brave. I feel like I’m treading water when I don’t even know how to swim. The land, the trees, birds and animals, give me comfort, keep me from drowning. I did buy a chain and lock for the gate at the top of the hill because I don’t want intruders at night. I used it a couple of times and then it got to be a hassle so I quit locking up. On this night, however, I pulled the car up to the gate, ready to head out if necessary, and closed the gate in front of it, locking it to protect my car. I felt ultra-safe knowing I was inside my fortress alone, with no possibility of trespassers.

Walking in the silent dark, leaving my car behind, I followed the narrow, half-mile serpentine driveway beneath its canopy of trees back toward my house by flashlight. To the left, among the trees, the beam of light caught a set of eyes glowing in my direction. I scanned the woods in a circumference and counted at least fifteen sets of eyes. They shone from behind trees, from down by the creek and up on the ridge. The same eyes, I imagined, who’d watched me unload my car. I turned off my light and stood for a moment in the black night, unable to see anything, just to feel their presence and to listen. Nothing moved, but the silence was full and gathered around me like a cloak, different from the night before, but still protective.

To see in the dark is a gift. Here, I was the only one who couldn’t see what lie ahead. I turned on my light again and watched them watch me while I walked. It felt like curiosity, but also acceptance, like they knew something I didn’t. Some were close, others more distant. I imagined the bodies of deer, babies and their mamas, quietly wandering the woods at night, surprised to see me out, but glad maybe for the company. I, too, was glad to be there, and glad

not to be alone. My married life had taken place inside the city limits, on a street with neighbors and sidewalks. The deer were luring me gently into this adventure that was my new life, or my ancestral life resurrected. I had seen coyotes during the day, but pushed them back to the cliffs in my mind where I knew the turkeys were roosting and would make tastier prey. Though I cringed when I heard the frantic gobbling and triumphant howls, sorry for what had to be, they helped me accept the brutal truth of this unchanging, ever changing circle of life. I knew, too, of a bobcat that lived in the barn and walked this very path to the creek, but she wanted rabbits, so I thought only of the deer, grateful and unafraid. They weren't my predators.

Divorce had been my most dreadful predator. It had stalked me throughout my journey, threatening me with failure and guilt and fear of the unknown. Now, I knew it was coming whether I liked it or not. I would face it, head on, like the fears I'd dissipated in my dreams. I was about to lose my health insurance. Was I afraid of the dark? Of living alone with nature? No. With my future at stake, it never dawned on me to be scared of the present. Wild eyes dotted the darkness like stars fallen from the sky. It was as if the heavy clouds had pushed the heavens down on the earth and everything that was real and important was here right now and surrounding me, holding me still. My heart, a red moon rising.

Thelma G. Wyland

THE CIRCLE OPENS

Nothing was clear to me that long-ago summer, but now I remember it in detail. So my brain plays its tricks.

In the quiet of an early summer morning, in the young years of the seventies, I drove into the parking area of Whitney Young Jr. Elementary School. At once numb and raw, I was struggling to live with the sudden death of my twenty-year-old son. I had recently moved to Louisville, where I was too new to know anyone to call on for comfort or support. For weeks, after I had seen my husband off to work, I walked in crushing circles around my house, from kitchen through dining and family rooms and back to the kitchen, where I stopped to drink more coffee, and read *The Courier-Journal* from column to column, line by line. When one morning I saw a story about a summer arts program, I made an appointment with the director at the University of Louisville and offered to teach piano. Truth was, I craved children. He'd received my offer with thanks, saying it rounded out his program, and he promised to alert the teacher in charge at the school to expect me on the appropriate day.

This was the day. For a moment I sat in my big old blue Buick to collect myself. Then ready for whatever adventure waited, I left the car, looked for the school door and walked in. I entered a room set up with long tables aligned with benches. Empty at the moment, it was big enough to echo my steps. I guessed it would work well as a theater, a lunch space or even a large lecture room. I didn't spend much time thinking about it though, because I saw in the corner a small office where people were coming in and out. I stood quietly in the doorway while what I assumed to be the woman in charge returned from escorting a teacher to his class room. Shakespeare. I think. She didn't respond to me with the same warmth, but I soldiered on explaining who I was and why I was there.

"We have no plans for a piano teacher," she said, looking a bit suspicious.

"Dr. Joseph said he would call you," I explained.

"He hasn't," was her curt response. "Sit over there."

Disappointed, and wishing I were anywhere else, I found a chair and sat while she greeted another teacher and returned from escorting him to his classroom.

"We do have a dance teacher who could use an accompanist. Would you be interested in doing that?"

I did a quick survey in my head. I was far, far from being a dance pianist, but at home, my life was waiting for me like a heap of broken pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, and I was trying to escape.

“Yes,” I said.

“The room is down the hall to your right.”

I picked up my papers. My ears led the way to the dance room where the class was already underway. What I heard was not the music I had expected, but the rhythmic beating of a small drum! I was about to learn more than I was going to teach. I broke in to introduce myself to this brunette, dancer-built young woman and explain my presence. I expressed puzzlement to Marjorie (that was her name) at the lack of warmth with which I had been received. She chuckled. “Haven’t you noticed? We’re the only white people here?”

I watched when the dance went on. Whatever kind of dance they were doing, the girls clearly loved it. I was totally lost in this world. I had enjoyed a few productions of the Tulsa ballet, where I had last lived in our nomadic existence, but I quickly discovered Marjorie’s devotion to modern dance. It was her conviction that ballet twisted the bodies of its dancers into abnormal and unhealthy positions. Alvin Ailey was a famous dancer from whom she had learned to use the small drum to hold her dancers together. Part of this sounded absurd to me, but I was there, and I watched the girls come each day because they enjoyed it. Marjorie’s major focus was on “making shapes.”

Each girl, perhaps ten in all, put her hand on her hip, thereby making a hole for the next girl’s arm. They created a long linked chain across the space and began moving in a tight unison, drawing a half circle on the floor as they stepped low to the side, then high to the back, low to the other side, then high to the back, and low to the other side before swooping down to repeat the pattern. Their heads dropped down to the side, then soared to the ceiling, and fell to the other side and then front before beginning again. At least that was the professional result of what they were learning. Meanwhile, the dancers might end up in a heap, laugh and try again, happy with this new way to dance. Always the drum kept them in rhythm. It was fun. It was energetic. Only a young or well-trained person would even try. Clearly, Marjorie did not need a pianist to keep the rhythm. Instead I became the guardian at the gates.

And just in time. A group of teen-aged boys looking for something to do had discovered the activity in the school. They came in to check it out, perhaps six or seven fifteen-to- seventeen-year-olds. The program was informal. No one took attendance or called the roll. But the boys were big, as well as curious. Their size and energy seemed to fill the large room where I had first heard echoes and wherever else they went. They traveled in a group, like whales in a pod—or like teen-age boys—to see what there was to see.

It did not take them long to find a room full of girls—and girls, arranged in Margie’s shapes, moving to the persistent beat of a drum. The boys had been roaming freely. No one had stopped them yet. There was irony there—it had to be me, who loved and ached for boys, who barred their way. But in a way, it was a comforting ache, like cauterizing a wound to help it heal. Dressed for vacation in shorts and short-sleeved shirts, they exuded boy. They were good-natured and persistent and kept coming back to peek and tease the dancers, always laughing in their loud voices. “That’s nothing. I can do that. That’s easy,” while using their feet to imitate the changing rhythm of Margie’s little drum. They were boys. And boys are noisy. But for Margie who loved and studied modern dance, for whom this dancing was serious business, the day came when she lost patience, said, “Let ‘em in. Maybe then they’ll go bother someone else. We’ll see what they can do.”

Very quickly, we saw! With exuberance, they copied the girls’ movements in the dance. Surprise in their faces, the big boys realized that watching and laughing had been easier than moving those lanky, loose-jointed and muscled bodies, when linked to other dancers, through the paces of modern dance. They didn’t laugh when they fell. Embarrassed, one by one, they left the studio, to the gleeful smiles and loud cheers of the girls. This time victory was theirs in the never-ending battle of the sexes.

When lunchtime came, I walked (as I did each day for six weeks) through the big all-purpose room to the kitchen. Sitting by himself in a dejected pose was one of our walk-in crew. I stopped to sit down beside him. “You’re by yourself today? What happened to your friends?”

“They make fun of my mother. Then I have to fight them. My mother doesn’t want me to fight. I’m not very good at it anyway. I can’t go home, but I have to go somewhere so I came here.” For all their size and noise and activity, it is my experience that boys are really delicate creatures, though you’d never make a friend by saying so, and here was a hurt one.

“Why?” was the obvious question. I worried that I was being intrusive, but he clearly welcomed a listener. “Why do they make fun of you and your mother?”

It was hard to say, and it didn’t come pouring out, but it was too painful to hold inside. We sat quietly for a bit while he gathered courage to say the words. “My mother is a prostitute.”

You don’t wrap your arms around a young man, especially in a public place, but the impulse is there. I wanted so much to comfort him. I put my hand on his, and he didn’t pull it away. “You love your mother?” I ventured. He lifted his head to look at me. The answer was in his eyes.

“I must go help in the kitchen,” I told him. “We will talk more, if you’d

like. You know who I am.”

He responded easily, “My name is Anthony.” At least he had his head up when I left him.

This arts program, as well as many others, was a federal one with two purposes: it gave kids something to do during the summer; and it was intended to improve their nutrition. That growing children and young adults need to eat well is not even arguable. But I was a mother, (I was getting better at smothering the spasm that came with the word.), and I knew you couldn’t use the stroke of a pen to make kids change their diet. But we were there every day and every day we tried. We set place after place up and down the long tables, each with a carefully wrapped sandwich, an apple or other hand fruit, and a carton of milk. Most of the group looked at it and took off for the corner store to buy something edible.

Ours was the painful job of throwing away rejected food. The guidelines were surely written by someone detached from the world they were trying to create. One of them stated that teachers were not to eat any of the sandwiches, fruit or milk we had just heaved into the great bin. I was not interested in food, because my stomach was still tied in knots, but the other teachers were trying to get themselves through the summer, and a free lunch mattered.

Part of the generation who grew up in the Great Depression, I remembered desperate men coming to the door begging for food. I do not forget seeing my father fill a plate from our simple dinner to take to one on the back steps. Though my father invited each to use the facilities of our house, no one ever accepted. Shame was too deep and painful. These men were called “tramps.” They made chalk marks on the street in front of our house to indicate this was a hopeful stop.

Wasted food brought out the fighter in me. Two or three days of watching this casual turning of good food into garbage, and I exploded. Not by nature either assertive or aggressive, I called to the others. “Watch me!” Feeling the rush of a righteous crusader, I dipped into the bin, took out a complete untouched lunch and said, “If anyone complains, I’m going to call *The Courier-Journal*.” Of course, no one reported me. (It would have made a good political story.) But several hungry teachers, who knew the futility of asking teen-agers to eat apples and drink milk when they craved coke and potato chips, joined in my rebellion.

Back to being Margie’s lion at the gate, I noticed two girls, probably fifth graders, hanging out in the hall outside what we had elevated to “the dance studio.” They apparently were waiting for their moment. Giggling, as if they had practiced, they said together, “You’re a tall, skinny lady in white floppy dresses.”

Mission accomplished, they ran. But I wondered what their mission was. In the early seventies, only the *avant garde* in the fashion world had started to wear pants. I certainly claimed no membership in that group. My radar of perception was limited to boys. So I wondered and puzzled.

When, over the days, they came by several times to repeat, “You’re a tall skinny lady with white floppy dresses,” I began to be more annoyed than amused. One day, though they seemed surprised, I suggested it would be nice if we talked out this strange mantra. The only private space I could find was at the very end of the hallway where we sat on the floor. I was then as flexible as the girls.

“Ladies,” I smiled and they looked uncertain. I suppose they wondered if they were in some sort of trouble. To them, I was “the teacher,” the all-powerful.

“It’s very simple,” I said. They shifted closer to each other. “You’ve come around several times now to make fun of me. Can you tell me why?” I was the grown-up here, trying to keep this light, but still caring very much how I was received in this environment. (This was different from the forthright Anthony.) Each girl looked at the other. “Who’s going first?” was the question I intuited. And I didn’t even know their names; they came and went so fast, they were like little spinning sprites.

Silence seemed my best defense. That sometimes makes people feel they must say something to make the quiet go away. This time it worked. Stepping on the others’ words, they explained, “We didn’t know if all white ladies wore white dresses. And we didn’t know anyone so tall before. Besides, we don’t know any other white people. Mostly, we didn’t know what you’d do.”

“I think you’re telling me we should all get to know each other better. I’ll vote for that.”

“You’re not really very scary.”

What could I say to that, but a black and white, “Thank you.”

“We’re sorry. Just please, don’t tell our mothers. We were rude, and they would scold because we should know better.” Relieved that it had gone so well (I hadn’t come here to be the enemy), I said, “You may tell them from me that they are raising two fine daughters.” We parted friends with hi-fives and handshakes all around.

As I walked back down the hall, I saw Anthony in the dance studio just lounging against the wall. I opened the door and beckoned him with my finger to join me. “I’ve been wondering about something.

Anthony is a strong masculine name. And you always use it whole. Even your friends don’t call you Tony.”

He smiled, and I was glad. “I’ve had to fight them about that, too. But

I won this one. It's my mother, isn't everything? She insists I'm going to be somebody when I grow up. She always says she named me Anthony because it sounds important."

"Good for your mother. Names do matter, and she obviously chose carefully. Thank you for sharing. Does that mean you do well in school?" Now, I'm really moving in, and I held my breath.

"Not bad, not good."

"For a mother who cares that much, could your grades improve?"

"All the teachers know what my mother is. They already think I'm no good because I come from such a bad place."

I was stunned into silence, because I knew it was probably true. I got myself into this. I had been warned of the danger. In spite of that, I had let my whole being reach out to this boy, this boy I was destined to lose. I waded in.

"Prove to them all how wrong they are, Anthony. Your mother gave you a strong name. Remember that. Make her proud."

I could only hope I had the right to talk thus to another's son.

School, if that's the right word, had been humming along for several weeks, and I had relaxed into feeling as if I belonged. I hadn't expected more trials. I was ambling home on Friday (if a car can amble), and thinking about Anthony. I was not the only one with problems this summer. He was easy to like, needy, and I had let myself become fond of him. I hoped I had offered him strength, but how could I be sure?

Seemingly out of the ground, a group of kids appeared on this country road, surrounding and rocking my car. I didn't and still don't know if they were any of ours. I just knew I was no longer in control. I pushed the button to lock the doors. Then I sat there waiting—while the car tipped from side to side closer to the ground each time. I don't remember being afraid. Maybe it was because I had already survived the worst thing that could happen to me. Perhaps I was still numb. Then like a miracle, in a flash the game was over. The kids disappeared as quickly and mysteriously as they had arrived. Shaking, I drove on home, grateful for the weekend to recover.

By now, in spite of our age difference, Margie and I had become friends. Though St. Louis was her home, she lived in an attic apartment in Louisville with her boyfriend who played in the orchestra. She was alone while he was at Interlochen, a prestigious summer music camp for professional musicians. I was going to be alone while my husband traveled for business. We were going to keep each other company at my house for the weekend. Since being alone was really lonely, I looked forward to her visit. We stayed home, slept late, listened to music and knitted.

She brought her knitting. I felt like plain Jane beside her. While I was knitting wool mittens for the church Christmas collection, Margie's bag opened to a sweater of her own design with fine silk aqua and deep-sea blue yarn to work on it. Margie, with her life still ahead, showed me the new, more open world of young women. This program was expanding—exploding—the circle of my life.

Her knowledge of serious music was wide and deep. She loved the “heavy” symphonies of Mahler and the melodic Chopin. We listened to all of my limited tape collection. In the seventies, tapes were up-to-date technology. To Margie, who played no instrument, music was not background comfort. As we listened, she alerted me to openings, repeated themes, and a change of mood or key. Something new to explore.

She lived the free life of a hippie or a beatnik, whatever the word was then, on the edge of the young but coming sexual revolution. There are so many versions of “right” in the world. We talked of the dilemma of someone like Anthony's mother—working in a despised profession because it was her only way to be a good mother. It wasn't only my world that was broken. And none of the paths of life seemed totally “right” or were easily accessed, when you were in crisis.

Margie went to New York from time to time for classes in modern dance. She had clearly been raised to mind her Ps and Qs and cross her Ts and dot her Is, but it would be a while before I understood that enigma. She was sensitive and sympathetic to my grief. That helped to relieve me of the weighty burden of silence in this new community of strangers.

Even better friends than before, we returned to the program Monday morning, Margie to dance with her girls, I to fret about Anthony.

More than half-way through our summer of art, Margie was planning for our part in the finale. For everyone, including our roaming boys and me, this was a riveting spectacle. She had begun to drag in cartons large enough to hold a folded-up girl in the position Margie shaped her into. Determined to make the final program a surprise, Margie firmly closed the door before each rehearsal to curious onlookers hovering nearby, including Anthony. Nothing excites like a mystery.

In this hubbub, I grabbed a moment with him to say, “I forgot the rest of our conversation the other day. I told you what I thought. I didn't ask where your mind was.”

He smiled broadly, even chuckled. “I know. You didn't ask me to promise to try. But I will.” I was amused by that superior growing-into-manhood look.

“Thank you, Anthony. And all kinds of good luck.”

Everything was revealed at the final day.

Margie had arranged the boxes, all of them painted black and cut with a side open to the back, in the empty spaces on the stage. Margie had arranged each girl into a shape full of angles and points within one of them. She then positioned them around the stage, with instructions NOT TO MOVE. Their self-discipline was so impressive that a male teacher walked to the middle of the stage to assure himself that they were alive and breathing. Who knows what he feared?

As the drumming began, isolated head, hands and feet slowly emerged from the tops and sides of the boxes and moved in rhythmic patterns, as though these boxes were sleeping creatures come to life. One dancer finally emerged from her box and was soon joined by another. They moved about the space turning the other boxes around to reveal the dancers inside. These began rolling and creeping from their cartons, while the two roving dancers wove in and around them. A hand slowly reached out from one and a foot from another. The girls stamped, jumped and clapped around the boxes, until one by one each returned to her own hiding place. Heads and arms randomly slunk from each box, only to return to the box's interior. The drum accompaniment and the isolated movements became sparser and sparser until finally there was no movement and no sound.

When the clapping and whistling quieted down, Anthony came to take my hand and lead me to his roaming friends. Standing by themselves, they were still excited about the girls and their boxes.

My heart sang when I heard him say, "I want you all to meet my mother."

Dance sequences thanks to Lynn Slaughter, author of recently published, While I Danced.

Grace Song

FRIDAY NIGHT

CHARACTERS:

Constance Lebona

Patricia Stelter

Mr. Scott Lebona

ACT 1 - SCENE 1

Scene: Friday Night. The bedroom of CONSTANCE. Night time. The room is clean and tidy. On the desk there are some books, and a bible. There is a cross nailed to the wall above the bed.

At Rise: When the CURTAIN rises Constance is sitting at the mirror putting on blush as PATRICIA curls her hair with an iron. The sound of Lady Gaga's "Poker Face" can be heard in the background.

PATRICIA. Can you not bob your head like that? I am holding an iron you know.

Constance continues to bob her head while applying blush.

PATRICIA. Look, if you're not going to stop, you'll have to leave the house with half a head of curly hair.

CONSTANCE. Do you think this is too much? *(Turns around and shows Patricia her face, which looks more like a tomato)*

PATRICIA. Would I be a bad friend if I let you leave the house like that?

CONSTANCE. I knew it. *(Starts to wipe away some of the blush)* How does the rest of my face look? Should I add some more foundation?

PATRICIA. I think you look fine. *(Picks up another strand of hair and starts to curl it)*

CONSTANCE. What kind of shoes should I wear?

PATRICIA. I don't know, comfortable ones?

CONSTANCE. Hmm . . . high heels? Maybe that's too trashy . . .

PATRICIA. I really don't know, stop asking me all these questions.

CONSTANCE. Oh God, What if he leaves the minute he sees my screwed up eyeliner and half curled hair?

PATRICIA. Maybe that will be a good thing.

CONSTANCE. Excuse me?

PATRICIA. I'm just saying . . . you've never even met the guy before. What if he turns out to be some total freak? You'll be glad you look like Medusa then.

CONSTANCE. You know, one day I'll laugh at your jokes.

PATRICIA. Do you honestly think this is a good idea? Maybe you should just stay home.

Constance says nothing and starts to put on eyeliner.

PATRICIA. Look, I just don't want you to get hurt again. I know what hapened last—

CONSTANCE. Didn't I tell you not to talk about last time?

PATRICIA. You never know how crazy these online things are, no one is real. They all claim to look like that but who knows if they have a 6th toe or something? What if they find out like last time and—

CONSTANCE. And I'm sure it will be different this time.

Patricia says nothing.

CONSTANCE. Are you done with my hair yet? I need to put the iron away before my dad comes back.

PATRICIA. Yeah, here. *(hands Constance the curling iron and makeup)* Look . . . I really don't think you should go. I also hate staying over at your house. Your dad always insists on reading the entire bible before he'll let me sleep.

CONSTANCE. Just don't let him come into the room. You know the drill: lock the doors, pretend to be sick, and tell him you're going to bed early.

PATRICIA. Look, it's not easy pretending to be you all the time. We don't even sound the same!

CONSTANCE. I know, I know . . . you're the best . . . thank you for doing this for me.

PATRICIA. I don't think you understand what I'm saying.

CONSTANCE. Why does everything you say always have to be so serious?

PATRICIA. I was the one that found you lying there. I was the one that had to drive you back last time. Do you really think I want to do that again?

CONSTANCE. And . . . that only happened because I made a little mistake. Who knew those tights were so sheer? See . . . *(takes Patricia's hands and runs them over her legs)* I even remembered to shave this time!

PATRICIA. *(Walks over to the bed and lies down)* Those people don't care about you. All they want is a little action and then they'll spit you right out.

CONSTANCE. Well, what if I want that too?

PATRICIA. No one can want something like that. Not even you.

CONSTANCE. What do you mean “not even me?”

PATRICIA. *(Rises slowly to sit on top of the bed but says nothing)*

CONSTANCE. *(Picks up a foundation bottle and starts twirling it around her hand)* You know what this is? This is L’Oreal’s foundation in warm beige. This little bottle does wonders for my skin, it’s pretty awesome.

PATRICIA. *(stares at Constance)*

CONSTANCE. Every Friday night, I pick up this little bottle and I erase everything that has happened from Saturday to Thursday. So you may think someone like me may not like those things, but let me tell you something, Patricia, I don’t just like it, I crave it.

PATRICIA. Stop.

CONSTANCE. What? Stop what? Is what I’m saying too grotesque for you?

PATRICIA. You think you can scare me away with that? Constance, I’m always here for you and you know that, right? But I don’t want to keep seeing you masquerading around town with random men you find online! You come home and the next week at school you look like a giant grape! You can’t keep letting those men do that to you.

CONSTANCE. I never said they did that to me. Do you think I would let them?

PATRICIA. What?

CONSTANCE. Anyway, can you pass me the lipstick? It’s in the box underneath the desk bed.

PATRICIA. *(Bends over and reaches underneath the desk and pulls out a small box. Inside is a collection of old eye shadow palettes, lipsticks, and brushes. Patricia passes Constance the lipstick)*

CONSTANCE. *(starts to apply lipstick slowly)*

PATRICIA. Constance, what is it going to take for me to convince you to stay in tonight? Can’t you do this for me? Take a night off.

CONSTANCE. No thanks. *(Opens mouth wide and applies more lipstick)*

PATRICIA. You’re doing that all wrong. *(gets off the bed and walks over and sits down on the chair next to Constance and takes the lipstick and slowly and expertly starts to apply the lipstick)*

PATRICIA. If you put it on like that you’ll get lipstick all over your teeth.

CONSTANCE. Thanks.

PATRICIA. *(Slowly starts to touch the parts of Constance’s face that is bruised)*

After some time, Patricia leans in and kisses Constance on the lips.

CONSTANCE. You can stop now.

PATRICIA. Sorry . . .

CONSTANCE. It's alright.

PATRICIA. You're, uh, breath smells like soap.

CONSTANCE. Yeah.

PATRICIA. (*Takes the bottle of foundation and starts reapplying it to Constance's face*) How can you like the bruises?

CONSTANCE. Everyone needs to learn to love the things they can't change.

Lucky for me, I didn't need to leave my own house to learn that lesson.

PATRICIA. What?

Downstairs, the sound of the front door can be heard opening and closing. There is some shuffling in the kitchen.

MR. LEBONA. (*loudly*) Constantine? Constantine! Are you home? What are you doing upstairs with that music?

CONSTANCE. Shit! Patricia, turn it off!

PATRICIA. Wait what? Oh! (*reaches for the speakers*)

CONSTANCE. (*hisses*) TURN IT OFF!!

Patricia reaches for the speakers and turns off the music and hurries toward the door.

PATRICIA. (*Opens the door and shouts in normal and low voice*) Sorry Mr. Lebona, it's me Patrick! I'm just doing a project with Constantine, I'll be leaving soon!

MR. LEBONA. Oh, Patrick! How nice of you to come by!

PATRICIA. Yeah thanks!

MR. LEBONA. Make sure you make Constantine do some work for once in his life.

PATRICIA. Will do!

MR. LEBONA. Oh Patrick, I was meaning to ask the other day but do you want to come to church with us this Sunday?

PATRICIA. Um . . . I'm not sure but I will think about it, Mr. Lebona! I might need to do chores or something.

MR. LEBONA. Oh, alright then, you boys turn off that music now and get to work.

BLACKOUT

Nivi R. Engineer

THE SAVIORS OF SCARBOROUGH: A PLAY IN ONE ACT

CHARACTER LIST

PRINCE PEPPER

PRINCE PAPRIKA

PRINCESS CARDAMOM

WIZARD

KNIGHT

DRAGON

BOY

VILLAGER

NARRATOR (wears period costume and stands on corner of stage, perhaps at a podium. A jester, perhaps)

SCENE 1

LOCATION: Stage Right: Village and beyond/behind that, woods. Stage Left: Castle. Between the two is a path, and along the path is a sign reading 'Welcome to the Kingdom of Scarborough'

NARRATOR: Once upon a time, in the kingdom of Scarborough, there was a castle. And in this castle lived a princess and two princes. Nearby, in the village, there lived a wizard. The four were the best of friends, and they had worked together to bring peace throughout the kingdom. But one day, a stranger came to town, a knight, riding on his horse. A knight on an important mission.

(PRINCE PEPPER, PRINCE PAPRIKA and PRINCESS CARDAMOM are outside, walking back to castle from the village (SR cross to SL). WIZARD's head appears on stage USR, visible on the outskirts of the village, unnoticed by the others. He peeks out and looks around, then shrugs his shoulders and steps on stage carrying a small basket in one hand and a wand in the other. He sets down the basket and holds out his wand. He mimes trying to do a spell, but nothing happens. He shakes his head. Throughout the following scene, he keeps trying to do spells, waving his arm in different ways, sometimes seeming hopeful but mostly not. NOTE: spells where things blow up succeed (small blast, or boom, or flash of light, or resultant item looking blackened). Others do nothing. He wanders, picking up invisible items and occasionally trying out spells on them.)

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: See, I told you he wouldn't be there. He never wants to see us anymore.

PRINCE PEPPER: I'm bored.

PRINCE PAPRIKA: Me too. I wish something exciting would happen.

KNIGHT: *(enter stage right, past the village, clop clop clopping all the way to the castle followed by villagers)* Princes! Princess! Help me!

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: *(to princes)* Do you know this guy?

PRINCE PAPRIKA: *(to PRINCESS CARDAMOM)* Nope. You?

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: *(shakes her head)* Who are you, stranger?

PRINCE PEPPER: What brings you here?

KNIGHT: I come seeking the Saviors of Scarborough, the Mighty Foursome who are famous far and wide for bringing peace and prosperity to this fair land.

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: *(to PRINCE PEPPER)* We're famous? Really?

PRINCE PEPPER: *(shrugs his shoulders)* The Saviors of Scarborough. That sounds pretty cool.

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: We should put that on our business cards.

PRINCE PAPRIKA: We should get business cards.

NARRATOR: As I said, the knight was on an important mission. A critical mission. A really important critical mission that didn't allow time to stand around listening to small talk.

KNIGHT: *(looks toward NARRATOR)* What? Oh, right. *(turns back toward others)* Excuse me . . .

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: And a website!

PRINCE PAPRIKA: And a Facebook page!

PRINCE PEPPER: We'll need a logo.

KNIGHT: Excuse me . . .

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: Wait—the Mighty Foursome. He must be talking about Wizard.

PRINCE PAPRIKA: Oh yeah. I wonder if he knows about this.

(PRINCESS CARDAMOM, PRINCE PEPPER, and PRINCE PAPRIKA start walking toward the village)

KNIGHT: Um, Excuse me. Saviors?

(PRINCE PEPPER, PRINCE PAPRIKA and PRINCESS CARDAMOM stop and turn around)

PRINCE PAPRIKA: Well, come along. You wanted the Mighty Foursome, right? Well, there's clearly only three of us here.

KNIGHT: Right, yes, of course.

(All exit to left, run into WIZARD walking to village)

PRINCE PEPPER, PRINCE PAPRIKA, PRINCESS CARDAMOM: Wizard!

WIZARD: Oh, it's you.

PRINCE PEPPER: Who did you think it would be?

PRINCE PAPRIKA: What kind of greeting is that for your three best friends?

WIZARD: Best friends? Really? When was the last time you came by and visited?

PRINCE PEPPER: *(to PRINCE PAPRIKA)* He does have a point. It has been minutes.

WIZARD: Minutes? Try months! You haven't stopped by once since I helped you save the kingdom.

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: Now wait a minute! Every time we stop by, you're gone.

WIZARD: A likely story.

KNIGHT: *(clears his throat)* Listen, I hate to interrupt this lovely reunion...

WIZARD: Who's this guy?

PRINCE PAPRIKA: Him? Oh he's...who are you again?

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: He came looking for us... all four of us. *(to knight)* You say it.

KNIGHT: *(sighing)* I come seeking the Saviors of Scarborough, the Mighty Foursome who are famous far and wide for bringing peace and prosperity to this fair land.

PRINCE PAPRIKA: See, doesn't that sound cool? He came by, and I thought we should put that on our business cards.

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: And our website.

NARRATOR: Knight?

PRINCE PAPRIKA: And our Facebook page.

PRINCE PEPPER: Right. And then I mentioned that we need a logo, and then we brought him here, because obviously if he's looking for the Mighty Foursome, well, then you should hear this too.

NARRATOR: Knight? *(KNIGHT turns his head away from NARRATOR)* Knight!

(KNIGHT looks at a spot on his armor and in an exaggerated manner focuses on it and mimes polishing it. Throughout this next dialog and up until KNIGHT speaks, the following scene ensues: NARRATOR looks at KNIGHT, shakes head, and marches over to KNIGHT in exaggerated fashion. KNIGHT sees

NARRATOR and turns away, so they do a full circle on stage. Finally, NARRATOR ends up facing KNIGHT and they mime an argument, NARRATOR pointing to others, KNIGHT playing innocent—first pointing to the spot on his armor and mime-polishing it, then throwing up hands in despair, then pointing to NARRATOR and nodding fervently - as if asking NARRATOR to interrupt the others)

WIZARD: So that's why you're here?

PRINCE PEPPER: Yep.

WIZARD: Not to visit, but to bring me more work?

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: What do you mean, more work? Maybe this guy just wanted to congratulate us.

WIZARD: We brought peace and prosperity to this fair land a year ago, and he's just getting around to congratulating us now?

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: Maybe he's from far and wide.

WIZARD: What?

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: Well, he said we are famous far and wide, and maybe it took a while for word to reach that far, and so by the time word reached, and he started his journey and then journeyed this far, it took a year.

WIZARD: Really?

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: What?

WIZARD: Please, Sir...

KNIGHT: *(NARRATOR nudges KNIGHT into position and rushes back to podium. PRINCE PAPRIKA watches NARRATOR leave but says nothing.)* Sir Laugh-a-lot.

(In following scene, PRINCE PAPRIKA follows NARRATOR, then sees him disappear off edge of "world." NARRATOR notices but says nothing, tries to hide out of view as PRINCE PAPRIKA looks around at edges of stage—right, up, left, down, behind him in a circle)

WIZARD: *(snickers)* Sir Laugh-a-Lot. Where are you from?

KNIGHT: The Land of Essex.

WIZARD: Essex? That's not very far.

KNIGHT: No. Just yonder. *(points off stage, stage left)*

WIZARD: And what brings you here, Sir Laugh-a-Lot? *(chuckles)*

KNIGHT: We need your help.

WIZARD: *(throws his hands up)* See, I told you. More work.

PRINCE PEPPER: What do you need help with, Sir Laugh-a-Lot? *(chuckles)*

(PRINCE PAPRIKA wanders back to others)

KNIGHT: It's the dragon.

PRINCE PAPRIKA: What dragon?

KNIGHT: The dragon that you got rid of to bring peace to this fair land.

PRINCE PAPRIKA: What about it?

KNIGHT: Well, now he's in our fair land.

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: Oh. So you need us to get rid of the dragon from your fair land.

KNIGHT: Yep.

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: Give us a minute, would you?

KNIGHT: Sure.

(PRINCE PEPPER, PRINCE PAPRIKA, PRINCESS CARDAMOM, and WIZARD step aside to talk. KNIGHT looks around)

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: I think we have to do this.

WIZARD: Oh, come on. Why?

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: Well, it is sort of our fault that they need help

WIZARD: No, it's the dragon's fault.

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: And we made the dragon leave here. We didn't exactly think about what it would do when it left here, did we?

WIZARD: No, I suppose not.

PRINCE PAPRIKA: How do we know it's the same dragon?

WIZARD: Ooh, good one.

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: Does it really matter? We know how to get rid of dragons—it'll say so on our business cards and everything—and so we should.

PRINCE PEPPER: And who will watch over our kingdom while we're gone?

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: The king and queen...

PRINCE PEPPER: Oh. Yeah. Them. Okay, well, I'm in. Wizard?

WIZARD: Very well.

KNIGHT: Woohoo! *(The others turn and look at KNIGHT, who has joined them in the conversation)* Follow me!

WIZARD: Not so fast. I shall need some magical supplies.

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: And we should tell the King and Queen where we're going.

(WIZARD leaves upstage right to his house, PRINCE PAPRIKA, PRINCE PEPPER and PRINCESS CARDAMOM walk stage left to castle, and KNIGHT

waits center stage for them to return. They all return carrying various supplies—a backpack, swords, and one person pulls a wagon with different silly things, including a pool toy.)

SETTING: The Land of Essex (identical set to Scarborough but with a different flag / family crest hanging from the castle. Or perhaps a sign appears on the set that is removed by a villager after the group gets off stage.)

NARRATOR: Our brave warriors finally leave the kingdom of Scarborough and set off to fulfill the urgent, critical, important mission. They march tirelessly over hill and dale, braving the elements on their quest. They reach the Land of Essex and see in the distance, a castle, and, running around the castle, a dragon.

(VILLAGER—looking slightly different, perhaps with a different colored hat, or the same hat turned sideways—places a “Welcome to Essex” sign down, then sees DRAGON appear. VILLAGER chases after DRAGON. They both disappear behind the castle, and then come back the other direction, VILLAGER is being chased by DRAGON)

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: Oh look at how cute he looks, running around there.

WIZARD: Oh, no. Not this again.

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: What?

WIZARD: You're not going to let us kill the dragon, are you?

PRINCE PAPRIKA: Why would we want to do that?

PRINCE PEPPER: You too? Are you serious?

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: Yes, we're serious. We cannot bring peace and prosperity to any fair land if it does not come peacefully.

KNIGHT: *(stops walking)* Wait a minute. You aren't going to slay the dragon?

WIZARD: Nope.

KNIGHT: Then why did I call you?

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: To bring peace to your fair land.

KNIGHT: Yes, by slaying the dragon.

PRINCE PAPRIKA: There is no need for violence. Besides, the king and queen would be quite angry if we messed up our play clothes with dragon's blood.

KNIGHT: So what do you plan to do?

PRINCE PAPRIKA: Take him home, of course.

PRINCE PEPPER: *(pulling out his sword)* What?! I didn't come along to . . .

KNIGHT: Okay, as long as it's out of our kingdom.

(KNIGHT walks on. PRINCE PAPRIKA and PRINCESS CARDAMOM follow. WIZARD and PRINCE PEPPER shake their heads, PRINCE PEPPER puts his sword back into his backpack with much difficulty, then they run to catch up to the others)

(VILLAGER runs and reaches the group)

VILLAGER: *(out of breath)* I'm sorry, Sir Laugh-a-Lot, *(the others all chuckle)* I could not vanquish the dragon.

KNIGHT: Thank you, brave villager, for trying. I have brought the Saviors of Scarborough.

VILLAGER: The Saviors of Scarborough? Here?! Wow! I must tell the others! *(runs off toward the village and off-stage)*

KNIGHT: Well, here you are. The dragon is there, *(points to castle)* and I'll be there *(points to the village)* at Ye Olde Candy Shoppe if you need me. *(exits toward village)*

(The Saviors of Scarborough stand around and stare at each other in silence. Every once in a while, they hear a loud roar from the castle, and one of them turns to look, but the dragon seems to be hiding from them behind the castle.)

NARRATOR: *(looks at the group standing there, then at the audience. He mimes trying to get them to do something, then shakes his head.)* The Saviors of Scarborough have a big job ahead of them. And they get right to it.

(PRINCE PAPRIKA hears the voice and responds to it, starts looking around to find the source, while the other 3 mime different plans—each takes a turn telling the others what to do and the others react by shaking their heads and taking a turn. PRINCE PAPRIKA shrugs his shoulders then makes his way back to the others)

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: Pepper, put away your sword before you poke Paprika in the proboscis.

(PRINCE PAPRIKA covers his nose, frowns then pouts at PRINCESS CARDAMOM. PRINCE PEPPER sheepishly puts away his sword. NARRATOR shakes his head and continues.)

NARRATOR: While they discuss strategy, I guess I'll fill you in with a little backstory. After being chased away from the Kingdom of Scarborough, the

dragon, which WIZARD had magically turned into a little lizard, has been growing and growing. For a long time, it rested and simply snuck onto farms at night to find something to eat.

(DRAGON acts all this out in background. VILLAGER 2 also mimes action throughout the scene.)

But, after a while, after being shoo'ed off each farm,

(VILLAGER2 mimes shooing DRAGON. DRAGON hangs his/her head first couple times, then direct addresses audience to correspond with the rest of the NARRATOR's line)

the little dragon began to grow angry at people for treating him so badly. I mean, all he wanted was some food.

(DRAGON rubs belly)

And a place to sleep. And maybe someone to play with. He was bored, after all.

(DRAGON nods, grinning. BOY is seen upstage walking from the village with a ball, tossing it up in the air and catching it. One time, it goes too high and too far, and DRAGON comes out and gets it. BOY starts to cry.)

WIZARD: Did you see that?

PRINCE PEPPER: I did! What a cruel and heartless dragon. We must act now.

WIZARD: All in favor of killing the dragon, say 'Aye.'

WIZARD, PRINCE PEPPER: Aye.

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: All opposed?

PRINCESS CARDAMOM, PRINCE PAPRIKA: Nay.

(Meanwhile, in the background, DRAGON comes out and starts running toward BOY, who runs off into the village. DRAGON drops the ball, then looks around. Not seeing BOY, he roars, then drops his head)

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: All in favor of talking to dragon and convincing him to leave, say Aye.

PRINCESS CARDAMOM, PRINCE PAPRIKA: Aye.

PRINCE PEPPER: All opposed?

WIZARD, PRINCE PEPPER: Nay.

PRINCE PEPPER: All in favor of capturing the dragon and making him leave?
WIZARD, PRINCE PEPPER: Aye.
PRINCESS CARDAMOM: All opposed?
PRINCESS CARDAMOM, PRINCE PAPRIKA: Nay.

(Meanwhile, in the background, NARRATOR wanders onto stage and exits stage in same spot that BOY had)

PRINCE PAPRIKA: All in favor of telling the King and Queen that Prince Pepper is still trying to fight even though they told him not to, say Aye
PRINCE PEPPER: All in favor of telling the King and Queen that Prince Paprika is a dragon-booger tattling poopy head, say Aye.
WIZARD: All in favor of exploding the dragon?
PRINCESS CARDAMOM: All in favor of playing music and luring the dragon away from the kingdom?
PRINCE PAPRIKA: All in favor of telling Prince Pepper to eat dragon boogers, say Aye.
PRINCE PEPPER: All in favor of turning Prince Paprika into a dragon booger say Aye.
WIZARD: *(throws his hands up in the air)* Stop! We're never going to get anywhere. Why are there four of us? Who's bright idea was that?
PRINCE PAPRIKA: Listen, if we try killing him first, we can't change our minds later. Why don't we try the peaceful approach first? And if that doesn't work, then we use the swords.
WIZARD: *(to PRINCE PEPPER)* He does have a point, you know.
PRINCE PEPPER: *(sighs)* I guess, but what if he attacks us?
PRINCESS CARDAMOM: No! No killing!
WIZARD: Fine, let's try it your way.

(BOY comes back, pulling KNIGHT with him, holding a sword in front of him. VILLAGER follows, holding a broom. DRAGON runs behind the castle. The Saviors walk toward the trio, who are close to the castle)

PRINCE PAPRIKA: *(approaching the group)* What are you doing?
KNIGHT: If you will not act, it seems we must. That dragon has stolen this little boy's ball.

(DRAGON peeks his head out. PRINCE PAPRIKA walks to the ball and picks it up.)

PRINCE PAPRIKA: You mean this ball?

(DRAGON comes out and runs toward PRINCESS CARDAMOM. PRINCE PAPRIKA starts to toss it up in the air, and DRAGON watches. When it gets away from PRINCE PAPRIKA, DRAGON rushes to it, picks it up, and runs in a circle)

PRINCE PAPRIKA: Hey! Give me that!

WIZARD: *(pulling out his wand)* Abracadab—

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: Wait! Did you see that?

PRINCE PEPPER: See what?

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: What the dragon did?

PRINCE PEPPER: Yeah, he stole the ball.

WIZARD: It worked!

(DRAGON drops the ball and stands back, not standing still)

PRINCE PAPRIKA: No, he fetched it.

(PRINCE PAPRIKA picks up the ball and tosses it. DRAGON runs and gets it and comes back to PRINCE PAPRIKA)

BOY: *(running up)* Let me try! Come here, Dragon.

VILLAGER: Wait! He's still a dragon. Dragons are dangerous!

BOY: That's not a nice thing to say.

(BOY picks up ball and tosses it. DRAGON fetches it, then lies down with ball)

KNIGHT: Of course it's not nice, but it's true. I have spent my whole career fighting dragons. They are fierce!

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: Does this dragon look fierce to you?

(DRAGON rolls onto his back and is snoring loudly)

KNIGHT: Maybe not now, but he is still little. He will grow to be an evil dragon like all the others.

(PRINCE PEPPER and PRINCE PAPRIKA nudge WIZARD, point for him to go forward. Finally, WIZARD comes forward)

WIZARD: Actually, he won't.

KNIGHT: What do you mean?

WIZARD: This is the same dragon that we chased from our kingdom last year.

KNIGHT: Yes, and now he has come here.

WIZARD: Do you know how we conquered him last year?

KNIGHT: With your might!

WIZARD: No. With my magic.

KNIGHT: With your magic?

WIZARD: I did a spell that turned him into a puppy.

VILLAGER: That is no puppy!

PRINCE PEPPER: No he is not.

PRINCE PAPRIKA: He's a year old. Now he's a dog.

WIZARD: It seems my spell only worked on the inside, but he still looks like a dragon on the outside.

VILLAGER: But he has been tearing down trees, ruining our houses!

PRINCESS CARDAMOM: Yeah, sorry about that. It seems he's teething. He'll grow out of it.

VILLAGER: Not here, he won't!

PRINCE PAPRIKA: Of course not. He's coming with us!

WIZARD: He is? (*PRINCESS CARDAMOM nods*) My first successful spell and I get to keep it? (*gasps*) I could train him. And he could help me pick herbs. Dragon scales do have many magic powers. Oh, goodie.

KNIGHT: Thanks for saving our village. Good luck to you all. (*everyone shakes everyone's hand. BOY gives the ball to DRAGON, who gives BOY a hug*)

WIZARD: Come on, Dragon. Let's go home!

NARRATOR: And so the Mighty Foursome (*DRAGON roars*) make that the Mighty Fivesome—heads back home to the Land of Scarborough, having brought Peace and Prosperity to the Land of Essex.

THE WOMAN OF LA MANCHA

by Karen Mann

Fleur-de-Lis Press, 2014, 354 pp.

It might be tempting to think of Karen Mann's new novel *The Woman of La Mancha* as a spin-off of Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, but this rollicking picaresque tale of a mysterious young beauty's adventures through sixteenth-century Spain stands on its own as a feminist narrative of self-determination, not to mention a pleasurable read in its own right. *The Woman of La Mancha* is Mann's debut novel, and what an expansive, uncommon debut it is. Ultimate questions swirl around Mann's heroine, known by many names throughout the book, who is determined to live on her own terms despite the limitations her culture presents.

Just as Don Quixote re-imagines the peasant girl-next-door as his "Dulcinea," the ideal but virtually unknown woman to whom he dedicates his chivalrous acts, Mann re-imagines the same near-anonymous country girl many times over throughout the course of her story. As Dulcinea—or Aldonza, as the girl knows herself—appears only on the fringe of Don Quixote's narrative, so does he on hers; Mann's heroine knows of him and admires his brave deeds from afar, but this is her story, not his.

The Woman of La Mancha opens when a girl in luxurious clothing is found tucked away in a farmer's rustic cart, with no memory of who she is or from where she hails. The farmer takes her in and raises her as his own. The reader knows her true identity—an aristocrat betrothed from birth to a young neighboring lord, the loyal Christopher—but she has no memory of her family of origin. How Aldonza, as she dubbed herself, came to be on her own, searching for her place in the world, is the mystery of the novel.

True to her beginnings as a blank slate, Aldonza is a seeker who never stops trying to find a place she can call home. The novel unfolds as a sprawling epic of sexual and personal awakening, as the girl slowly realizes that she doesn't quite fit into the world of the peasants she has grown to love. On her first foray into the wider world, she dabbles in gender-bending and confronts the freedoms—and chivalric responsibilities—afforded only to men in her world. Her next guise brings her to live in a high-end brothel. Mann weaves these dueling identities into one believable woman who questions her place in the world, but not her right to find it.

Running parallel to her story is Christopher's, as he takes to the road to find her and experiences some of the same freedoms and horrors. Patriarchy affects everyone in La Mancha, even Aldonza's male foils, who are themselves not

shielded from sexual and cultural violence. The scope of the novel is satisfying, but that parallel narrative is missed when it drops off as Christopher admits defeat and sequesters himself in monastic study, not to resurface until later in the story.

Mann has a historian's love for the small detail, and her meticulous research paints a believable portrait of sixteenth-century Spain. At times, Mann's reliance on footnotes to annotate small cultural details easily explained through context distracts more than it illuminates. In her many incarnations, Aldonza experiments with identity, power, independence, and desire as she develops and refines a moral code on her own terms, and that is where the meat of the story lies, not in fashions of the time or place-specific terminology.

Mann engages with fundamental internal human struggles in this book: can luck be both good and bad at the same time? What does it mean to be free? To be pious, or even just *good*? When Aldonza, confronted with the incorrigible violence lurking in her adopted sister, asks, "can those of us with any goodness believe in such strong evil?" Mann puts her novel's central question to all of us: how do we learn to trust ourselves and come out of traumas large and small with our true selves intact? Aldonza might not know her real name throughout most of her story, but through her experiences, she discovers her true self, and her journey is as pleasurable as it is instructive.

—Erin Keane

COME LANDFALL

by Roy Hoffman

University of Alabama Press, 2014, 274 pp.

Alabama writer and journalist Roy Hoffman's new novel *Come Landfall*, his third, tackles the devastation war inevitably brings to families and survivors, even well after peace has been declared. He bookends his intergenerational story with two iconic tragedies, opening on the first anniversary of the September 11 attacks and closing three years later, as Hurricane Katrina crashes into Biloxi, Mississippi, destroying homes, businesses, and re-charting the course of residents for years to come.

With a cartographer's dedicated heart, Hoffman brings the storm-threatened Mississippi Sound coastline alive as a sweeping, haunted metaphor for the new South, where Buddhist Cam Nguyen, the daughter of immigrants, witnesses and testifies alongside Franklin Semmes, a born-again evangelical Christian who captures the heart of Angela, a firecracker of a casino waitress. In *Come Landfall*, Antebellum mansions abut glossy casinos and children of Vietnamese immigrants find themselves wedged between their native and adopted cultures—both old, both custom-bound. The threat of violence is inescapable and real. *Come Landfall* doesn't over-romanticize the Gulf, but Hoffman gives it its due as a terrible and fragile beauty, brimming with romance and danger and wildness.

Like the hurricanes that threaten the coast every year, the violence of war swirls around the borders of the lives of the women at the heart of this story. While a little aimless in most things, Angela is devoted to Christiane, her widowed Nana, a once-beautiful Southern WASP with a sharp mind and wit now slipping into the throes of dementia. Christiane's tenuous grasp on time jettisons her back to World War II, as memories of her first husband, a dashing Jewish poet who disappeared after being taken prisoner by the Japanese Army, become real to her again.

When Angela falls in love with Frank, a weather geek stationed at the nearby Air Force base, the looming war in Iraq becomes personal. Frank loves Angela, Jesus, and country, and she's not always convinced she comes first. She channels her anxiety over Frank's imminent deployment into resolving the decades-old mystery that haunts her Nana. In the midst of all of this, Cam, the sensitive pianist daughter of an emotionally-distant Vietnamese shrimper, befriends Angela and Christiane as she embarks on her own ill-fated romance. Each of Hoffman's vibrant women is traumatized by foreign a conflict they did not sign up to fight: Christiane by WWII, Angela by Iraq, and Cam by

her father's experiences in the Vietnam War, which drove her family from their homeland. Vietnam also haunts Angela, whose own father allows the emotional and psychological scars of his service to affect their relationship. Hoffman's writing on war feels most persuasive when dealing with the past. No wonder, since time and distance provide a certain perspective.

But Frank's war, the war of *now*, is a more difficult animal. As is Frank himself. His hawkish rhetoric can sound like an over-correction: too rehearsed, too blustery, filtered as it is through Angela's skeptical ears. And he's constantly trying to convince Angela to get right with Jesus, as he has. Hoffman hasn't made him nearly as easy to love as Rosey, Christiane's doomed poet-soldier, a consummate romantic hero who also has the benefit of being softened by time, tragedy, and tricky memory.

But love Frank we must, because he is as integral of a part of this contradictory landscape as plucky Cam and genteel, nostalgia-haunted Christiane. Even after he deploys, he echoes through Angela's story like "sad music along the shrouded coastline," unseen but never absent, waiting to swirl back to her shores or fade into the creases of history.

—Erin Keane

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

STEPHANIE BARTON currently lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico with her husband and a cross-eyed dog. She received her MFA in Creative Writing from Vermont College of Fine Arts.

POLLY BUCKINGHAM's chapbook *A Year of Silence* won Jeanne Leiby Memorial Chapbook Award for fiction and was published in 2014 by The Florida Review Press. Her stories and poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Threepenny Review*, *The New Orleans Review*, *The North American Review*, *The Tampa Review* (Pushcart nomination), *The Chattahoochee Review*, *The Potomac Review*, *The Moth*, and elsewhere. She is a 2014 recipient of a Washington State Artist Trust Fellowship and was a finalist for the Flannery O'Connor Award in 2011, 2012, and 2013. Polly is founding editor of StringTown Press and teaches creative writing and literature at Eastern Washington University.

PAUL CODY was born and raised outside Boston, has degrees from the University of Massachusetts–Boston and Cornell University, and is the author of four novels, including *The Stolen Child* and *So Far Gone*, and a memoir, *The Last Next Time*.

DONNA McCLANAHAN CROW lives in Irvine, Kentucky on her family farm. She writes fiction, creative nonfiction, and poetry. Her nonfiction has won such awards as the Emma Bell Miles Award for essay, the Wilma Dykeman Award and the Betty Grabehart Prize (2007). She received the 2008 Sue Ellen Hudson Award for Excellence in Writing for her fiction and her poetry has won the Gurney Norman Prize. Her work has appeared in *Kudzu*, *Now and Then*, *Literary Leo*, *The Minnetonka Review*, and was anthologized in *We All Live Downstream*, *Outscapes: Writings on Fences and Frontiers*, and *The Notebook*, among others. She received her MFA in creative nonfiction from Spalding University.

ADAM DAY's forthcoming volume of poetry is *Model of a City in Civil War* (Sarabande). He is the recipient of a PSA Chapbook Fellowship for *Badger*, *Apocrypha*, and of a PEN Emerging Writers Award. His work has appeared in the *Boston Review*, *Lana Turner*, *APR*, *Poetry London*, *AGNI*, *The Iowa Review*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Guernica*, and elsewhere. He coordinates The Baltic Writing Residency in Latvia, Scotland, and Bernheim Arboretum & Research Forest.

GEOFF DENNIS is twenty-three years old. He lives in Portland, Oregon.

NIVI R. ENGINEER is the author of *The Indian Girl's Definitive Guide to Staying Single*. She earned her BA in English from Case Western Reserve University, an MS in Computer Science from Washington University in St. Louis, and is pursuing an MFA in Fiction from Spalding University. She lives in Cleveland Heights, Ohio with her husband, three sons, and dog.

MOLLY GILES has published three award-winning books of short stories and a novel. Her fourth story collection, *All the Wrong Places*, just won The Spokane Prize, and an ebook

of stories, *Three for the Road*, is available from shebooks.net. She has new work in *Apogee* and *New Flash Fiction*. For more information: mollymgiles.com

CLAY GRAHAM is a twenty-three year-old MA (in Humanities) student at the University of Louisville. He received a BA in Philosophy from Western Kentucky University in 2013. He was born and raised in Elizabethtown, KY, where he lived with his parents and sister. He currently lives in Louisville. Poetry is something he's only pursued for roughly a year now, but he's found he enjoys writing with great vigor, a passion he hopes does not fade.

PATRICIA GRAY lives and works on Capitol Hill, where she formerly headed the Poetry and Literature Center at the Library of Congress. Her collection, *Rupture*, was published by Red Hen Press, and her poems have been short-listed for the Ann Stanford National Poetry Prize and the New Millennium Poetry Prize. Her work has appeared in *Ekphrasis*, *Best of Potomac Review*, *Poetry International*, *Poetry East*, *The MacGuffin*, *Shenandoah*, and others. Her MFA in creative writing is from the University of Virginia, where she won the Academy of American Poets award.

FRANK GUAN was born in Texas and raised in Kentucky. He attended school in California and now lives in New York. His critical essays have appeared in *n+1*.

FENTON JOHNSON is the author of two novels, *Crossing the River* and *Scissors, Paper, Rock*, as well as *Geography of the Heart: A Memoir* and *Keeping Faith: A Skeptic's Journey among Christian and Buddhist Monks*. Johnson has contributed cover essays and stories to *Harp-er's Magazine*, *The New York Times Magazine*, and many literary quarterlies. He has received fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, two Lambda Literary Awards, a Kentucky Literary Award in creative nonfiction, and the American Library Association Award for best gay/lesbian nonfiction. He is on the faculty of the creative writing programs at the University of Arizona and Spalding University. For more information: www.fentonjohnson.com.

RAY KEIFETZ has published poems and stories in *The Bitter Oleander*, *Kestrel*, *Sugar House Review*, *burntdistrict*, and an Ashland Creek Press anthology, *Among Animals*. His work has been nominated to appear in the Pushcart Prize and Best New Poets anthologies. He lives in Northern California where he supports himself and his writing by peddling wine.

J. ROBERT LENNON is the author of two story collections and seven novels, including *Mailman*, *Familiar*, and *Happyland*. He teaches writing at Cornell University. His forthcoming collection is titled *See You in Paradise*.

SONJA LIVINGSTON's latest book, *Queen of the Fall*, is forthcoming from the University of Nebraska Press. Her first book, *Ghostbread*, won an AWP Prize for Creative Nonfiction. Recent essays appear in *Arts & Letters*, *Bellingham Review*, *Brevity*, *The Seneca Review*, and others. Her writing has earned many honors, including an Iowa Review Award, a Susan

Atefat Prize, an AWP Intro Award, and fellowships from New York Foundation for the Arts, the Vermont Studio Center and the Deming Fund. Sonja splits her time between New York and Memphis, where she teaches in the MFA Program at the University of Memphis.

JOEL LONG's book *Lessons in Disappearance* was published in 2012. *Knowing Time by Light* was published by Blaine Creek Press in 2010. His book *Winged Insects* won the White Pine Press Poetry Prize and was published in 1999. His chapbooks, *Chopin's Preludes* and *Saffron Beneath Every Frost*, were published from Elik Press. His poems have appeared in *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Ocean State Review*, *Quarterly West*, *Gulf Coast*, *Rhino*, *Bitter Oleander*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Bellingham Review*, *Sou'wester*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Willow Springs*, *Poems and Plays*, and *Seattle Review* and anthologized in *American Poetry: the Next Generation*, *Essential Love*, *Fresh Water*, and *I Go to the Ruined Place*. He received the Mayor's Artist Award for Literary Arts at the Utah Arts Festival and the Writers Advocate Award from Writers at Work.

ANN LYNN is the author of a chapbook of poems, *In the Butterfly House*, published by Finishing Line Press. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in magazines that include *Poetry East*, *Poet Lore*, *Subtropics*, *Rhino*, *Many Mountains Moving*, and *The Midwest Quarterly*. She lives in Atlanta, where she teaches writing workshops. Her special interest is using writing as a means of empowerment and healing.

PETER MAKUCK, twice a winner of the Brockman-Campbell Award for best book by a North Carolinian, lives on Bogue banks, one of the state's barrier islands. His *Long Lens: New & Selected Poems* was published in 2010 by BOA Editions, Ltd. and nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. His poems and stories, essays and reviews have appeared in *The Georgia Review*, *The Hudson Review*, *Poetry*, *The Sewanee Review*, *The North American Review*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *The Nation*, and so on.

BETSY MARTIN works at Skinner House Books in Boston. She has advanced degrees in Russian language and literature and lived in Moscow for a year studying at the Pushkin Institute. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Assisi*, *Barely South Review*, *Diverse Voices Quarterly*, *Existere*, *Gemini Magazine*, *Green Hills Literary Lantern*, *Limestone*, *Minetta Review*, *Sanskrit*, *Front Range Review*, *The Alembic*, *Pirene's Fountain*, *Schuylkill Valley Journal*, *Weber—The Contemporary West*, and others.

LESLÉA NEWMAN is the author of sixty-five books for readers of all ages including the poetry collections *Still Life With Buddy*, *Nobody's Mother*, *Signs of Love*, and the novel-inverse *October Mourning: A Song for Matthew Shepard*. Her literary awards include poetry fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Massachusetts Artists Foundation. From 2008-2010 she served as the poet laureate of Northampton, Massachusetts, and she is currently a faculty member of Spalding University's low-residency MFA in Writing program. "My Mother Is" is excerpted from her newest poetry collection, *I Carry My Mother*, forthcoming from Headmistress Press in January 2015.

RICHARD NEWMAN is the author of the poetry collections *All the Wasted Beauty of the World* (Able Muse Press, 2014), *Domestic Fugues* (Steel Toe Books, 2009), and *Borrowed Towns* (Word Press, 2005). He serves as editor of *River Styx* and co-director of the *River Styx* Reading Series.

JEREMY DAE PADEN is an associate professor of Spanish and Latin American literature at Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky. His chapbook, *Broken Tulips*, was published by Accents Publishing in 2013. His poems have also appeared in *Adirondack Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Beloit Poetry Review*, *California Quarterly*, *Cortland Review*, *Limestone*, *The Louisville Review*, *pluck!*, *Rattle*, and various other journals and anthologies with names like *Rabbit Catastrophe* and *Artichoke Haircut* and such.

JOHN REPP's most recent collection is *Fat Jersey Blues*, winner of the 2013 Akron Poetry Prize from the University of Akron Press.

CYNTHIA ROBINSON's short fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in *Slice*, *Arkansas Review*, *Epoch*, and *The New Southerner*. She has just completed a novel, *The Science of Birds*. In addition, she is professor of Medieval and Islamic Art at Cornell University, where she chairs the department of the History of Art.

JILL ALLYN ROSSER's fourth collection of poems, *Mimi's Trapeze*, will appear in fall 2014 from the University of Pittsburgh Press. Her previous books are *Foiled Again*, *Misery Pre-figured*, and *Bright Moves*. Her work has been awarded the Morse Poetry Prize, the New Criterion Poetry Prize, the Wood and Frederick Bock prizes from *Poetry*, and fellowships from the Lannan and Guggenheim Foundations.

FLORA K. SCHILDKNECHT received her Master of Fine Arts in Writing from Spalding University in 2014. She currently teaches composition at Ivy Tech Community College, in Sellersburg, Indiana. Her fiction has recently appeared in *2nd & Church*.

ROCHELLE JEWEL SHAPIRO's first novel, *Miriam The Medium* (Simon & Schuster), was nominated for the Harold U. Ribelow Award. Her novel *Kaylee's Ghost* (Amazon and Nook) is an Indie Finalist. Her new short story e-collection, *What I Wish You'd Told Me*, is published by Shebooks. She's published essays in *NYT (Lives)*, and *Newsweek* and in many anthologies. Her poetry, short stories, and essays have appeared in *The Coe Review*, *Compass Rose*, *The Griffin*, *Inkwell Magazine*, *The Iowa Review*, *Los Angeles Review*, *The MacGuffin*, *Memoir And Moment*, *Negative Capability*, *Pennsylvania English*, *The Carolina Review*, and more. She won the Brandon Memorial Literary Award from Negative Capability. Shapiro currently teaches writing at UCLA Extension. <http://rochellejewelshapiro.com>

NEIL SHEPARD has two new books: his fourth full collection of poetry, *(T)ravel/Un(t)ravel* (2011), and a chapbook, *Vermont Exit Ramps* (2012). His next book, *Hominid Up*, is due from Salmon Poetry (Ireland) in January 2015. His poems appear online at *Poetry*

Daily, Verse Daily, and Poem-a-Day (Academy of American Poets), as well as in several hundred print journals.

GRACE SONG is a writer and actor pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. *Friday Night* is her first play. She can be contacted at grace.song@nyu.edu

DAVID STARKEY served as Santa Barbara's 2009-2010 Poet Laureate and is Director of the Creative Writing Program at Santa Barbara City College. His poetry has appeared in many journals, including *The American Scholar, The Georgia Review, and The Southern Review*, and in six full-length collections, most recently *It Must Be Like the World* and *Circus Maximus*.

JOSHUA MICHAEL STEWART is a Massachusetts Book Award nominee, and the author of two chapbooks, *Vintage Gray*, published by Pudding House Publications in 2007, and *Sink Your Teeth into the Light*, published by Finishing Line Press in 2012. He has had poems published in *The Massachusetts Review, Connecticut River Review, Worcester Review, Euphony, Rattle, Cold Mountain Review, William and Mary Review, Pedestal Magazine, Evansville Review, and Blueline*. Hedgerow Books will publish his first full-length poetry collection, *Passage to the Orchards*. He lives in Ware, Massachusetts.

SUSAN TEKULVE is the author of *In the Garden of Stone*, winner of the 2012 South Carolina First Novel Award and a 2014 Gold IPPY Award as the best novel published in the South by an independent press. She's also published two short story collections: *Savage Pilgrims* and *My Mother's War Stories*. Her stories and essays have appeared in *Shenandoah, The Georgia Review, New Letters, Denver Quarterly, Puerto del Sol, Crab Orchard Review, and The Literary Review*, among other places.

EUGENIE JULIET THEALL completed her MFA in Poetry from Sarah Lawrence College and currently teaches creative writing and English. Her poetry has been published in *Carquinez Poetry Review, Hawaii Pacific Review, Hampden-Sydney Poetry Review, and Silk Road*, among others. Miss Theall's work also won first place in the Elizabeth McCormack/Inkwell contest.

MARYFRANCES WAGNER's books include *Salvatore's Daughter, Light Subtracts Itself, and Red Silk*, winner of the Thorpe Menn Book Award. Her poems have appeared widely including *New Letters, Midwest Quarterly, Laurel Review, Voices in Italian Americana, Birmingham Poetry Review, Unsettling America: An Anthology of Contemporary Multicultural Poetry* (Penguin Books), *Literature Across Cultures* (Pearson/Longman), and *The Dream Book, An Anthology of Writings by Italian American Women* (winner of the American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation). She co-edits the *I-70 Review*.

MARK LEE WEBB is the editor and publisher of *A Narrow Fellow Journal of Poetry*. His poems have been published in numerous journals, both in the United States and abroad. ELJ Publications released his book, *The Weight of Paper*, earlier this year. Mark presented

his newest poetry manuscript, *Whateverits*, at the 2014 University of Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture. Finishing Line Press will publish it in 2014.

PAUL WILLIS is a professor of English at Westmont College and a former poet laureate of Santa Barbara. His most recent collections of poetry are *Say This Prayer into the Past* (Cascade Books, 2013) and *Rising from the Dead* (Wordfarm, 2009). Learn more at www.pauljwillis.com.

MARIAN WILLMOTT is a writer and an artist living in Vermont, enjoying both the solitude of the mountains and a vital artistic community. Her work has been accepted for publication in *Calyx*, *Salamander*, *Denver Quarterly*, *The Worcester Review*, *Karamu*, and *The Comstock Review*, among others, and in an anthology, *Unbearable Uncertainty*. *Turnings*, a poetry chapbook, was published by Pudding House Publications. More of her work can be seen at www.willmottstudios.com.

JEFF WORLEY'S most recent poems can be found in current issues of *Southern Poetry Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Midwest Quarterly*, and *Tampa Review*. His latest book is *A Little Luck*, which won the 2012 X.J. Kennedy Poetry Prize from Texas Review Press.

THELMA G. WYLAND holds a BA in English from Connecticut College and another in music from Bellarmine University. She took creative writing courses at the University of Louisville, which led to her enrollment in the inaugural class of the MFA in Writing Program at Spalding University. A Kentucky transplant from Connecticut, she has lived in Louisville since 1972.

The
Children's
Corner

Emily Zhang

DAILY HAZARDS

The other day we went fishing by
the docks all cellophane skeleton, held
casting rods like pistols. The palm
trees stooped to greet us. I lugged the
radio over like a body, cracked garnet
in its teeth. We listened for static
and glimpses of winter, but sometimes that
blanket of a sky over them, over all of us,
would cough. Like a film strip reeling until
it forgets that it's a film strip: out shook
smoke and fish spines, both gutted to make
room for better things. You hoisted another
out of the water, pure, glistening with shine.
Showed me how to clean it, slow sea swell, I
have learned that nothing can be protected
anymore. There, in the midst of honey-slicked
June, pink intestines sinking like a fresh
bloomed flower, singing: plucked too soon,
this is how we go. Save the eyes for last:
I wish, I wish.

Emily Zhang

AFFLATUS

Here on the shore chalk
pastels crumble in the clouds, air
minimally sweet. Apples
hang heavy off the branches
with lethargy.
I have learned a thing or two about the
human mind, its
recycling emotion from the knurled oak
of trees. Years of osmosis
molding like a serpent.
The atmosphere whispers with moth wings
stitched by anticipation; you said that heaven
was like a washing machine.
I was afraid to leave this everything. The
ocean has the same troubles of
repeating itself, editing: world
shrunken in routine.

Simple things, catharsis. Docked
behind my ears, I wanted to fall away
in a high speed car crash, meet
a boy with glass in my
hair whose matchstick fingers
knew nothing but
poetry. With a jolt or two of
the unnatural, a dip outside of egg-shelled
reason, everything spills
into motion. Slow lightning
crawling until it forgets
that it is lightning, sweeps tidal waves.
I have learned to live and die
one hundred tree-branch lives.

Emily Zhang

SOMETHING SACRED

The other day I saw a
deer stop in its tracks; slip
out of the woods like
a golden phantom. Sidewalk
eyes. I am the deer, but
that is a different poem.

Sunlight sifts through
as sand in an hourglass. This
place, if I could offer a
piece of my candlestick bone,
melting. Slow colors,
on buttered Tibetan mornings
people bow their heads
one thousand times between
glimpses of breath. A
girl strums a string with wavering
fingers and a mile away
humming suspends still in the air.
My mind burns of
incense. I have two gated wrists:

slowly they curl into red, into the
familiar. Silk slips
in my veins. Two thousand feet
above this world,
my prayers are read by the wind.

Kian Vilhauer

THE CATERPILLAR

Once I was a caterpillar
Small, weak, and sluggish
A word an hour, a sentence an eternity
The world around me powerful, rushing by
Leaving me unable to write a logical thought
And I, oppressed, ignored, told that I couldn't write,
As the caterpillar is ignored because its potential cannot be seen,
Scared to look around, incapable of putting my thoughts on paper,
Struggling to complete a story,
Fearful of those known as stronger,
Only because they could write fast
Unknowing of my hidden talent

I slowly grew stronger
Encouraging words from teachers
Were food to help me grow larger, faster, smarter
My chrysalis began to form,
Woven from the words "You have potential" and
"Keep trying, you're getting better"
Within my chrysalis I was still weak and slow,
But I could see a future for myself,
Not eternally the slow, plodding caterpillar
Unable to do anything except barely survive
And still little by little I grew stronger
Ready to burst forth anew, full of prowess

And so came the day when I
Was to struggle from my chrysalis,
And slowly flap and flutter my wings for the first time
And be freed from what weighed me down before
Now I could write, and write well,
And although I was far from the strongest,
My strength was enough for me to thrive
And I was still not the fastest,

But I could almost easily now overcome obstacles,
I would get where I was going,
Like how I could finish a piece with my still slow
But now graceful writing

Daniel Kwiatkowski

EXPECTING RAIN

Rain poured down in front of us
but we were shielded.

Her arms around our shoulders,
we rocked, back and forth,
on the old wooden swing,
with the peeling green paint.

Tall, stone, columns held up the porch roof,
framing our view.

We swayed, silent yet comfortable
peering through the darkness,
broken by a lone streetlight,
to watch the rain as it fell onto our driveway,
then flowed out and away,
down the road.

The creak of the swing,
sometimes bothersome on sunny days,
was muffled by the roar of the rain,
pitter-pattering on the roof above us
interrupted
by patternless crashes of thunder.

She broke our focused hush
to answer the question on both of our minds.

No she wasn't just getting fat,
but soon that rickety, old, wooden swing
would be a little more crowded.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS TO THE CHILDREN'S CORNER

DANIEL KWIATKOWSKI is a rising senior at Newark Academy high school in New Jersey. He took a creative writing class this year and has watched his work progress significantly throughout. He is the captain of his school's golf team and also a huge Philadelphia Eagles fan. Daniel is the president of Newark Academy's Cancer Awareness club and devotes a lot of his time and energy helping to fight the disease. He looks forward to pursuing his writing further in college.

KIAN VILHAUER is fourteen years old and a ninth grader at Wayne Valley High School in New Jersey. He wrote this poem in eighth grade. His favorite subjects are science, math, and Latin. He plays the saxophone, and enjoys playing video games and reading fantasy and science fiction.

EMILY ZHANG is a high school student from Washington D.C. Her poetry has previously appeared in the *Blue Pencil Online*, *Navigating the Maze*, and *GREYstone*. When not writing, she enjoys painting and watching reality television.

