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clarion

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clarion¹⁴

And the roaring torrent is deep and wide—
You may hear how loud it washes.
But still that clarion voice replied:
“I’ve got my old goloshes.”

– A. E. Housman



Boston, Massachusetts

about clarion

In 1998, the undergraduate members of the Boston University Literary Society published the first issue of the magazine which would become Clarion. In 2008, the editors decided to expand their purview beyond the campus, opening submissions to all writers.

submissions

The editors welcome poetry, drama, fiction, creative non-fiction, and interviews with literary figures, as well as photography and illustration. Correspondence and submissions are welcome at any time, for consideration on a rolling basis. Contributors need not be affiliated with Boston University. Notification may be delayed during the summer month; queries will be answered promptly. Submissions may be sent as RTF or DOC email attachments to buclarion@gmail.com or in hard copy to Boston University Literary Society attn. *Clarion*, c/o Student Activities Office, One University Road, Boston, Massachusetts, 02215.

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WILLIAM DORESKI

fear of sinking knee-deep

The narrow streets of Venice end
at canals. The greasy water
mocks me with a thousand boats

tethered and bobbing in barely
perceptible tide. This city
isn't a city but a fluster

of houses clinging to each other
and trying to box enough space
to render their owners immortal.

It hasn't worked. San Michele,
the squarish island of the dead,
embodies that failure with tombs

arranged to catch the light just so.
I wouldn't dare set foot on it
for fear of sinking knee-deep

and never freeing myself. The walk
to La Fenice defeats me.
I'm stuck at the statue of Danielle

Manin, whose soiled bronze expression
faces the house he owned when
he struck against Austrian rule.

I appreciate his fervor
but he can't give directions
so I settle for an espresso

and stare into the rio in hopes
of reading its modest depth. A slur
of Venetian dialect puzzles

rather than enlightens, but a man
points across the canal and claims
“Opera.” He somehow read me

the way I might read Rimbaud’s
“Season in Hell.” The evening shifts
from pastel to cinema gray.

I cross a bridge and stray down
Calle della Verona toward
the rebuilt opera house where Verdi

will have his say again and again
no matter how often the structure
burns and rises from its ashes,

no matter how often I drown
myself in the blueblack rios
that ought to prevent such fires.

JANET BUTLER

vanishing point

All roads lead to Rome.
Perhaps not.

I posit:
a rough grained paper stretched taut
a gliding pencil
meeting resistance.

Minuscule ridges and valleys that pull and break
the smooth soft graphite
into paths a stop start pause then push.
A pioneer through virgin lands.

Lines connect and curves enclose
and angled corners promise depths
that lead to distant hills that cover
distant hills,
all vanishing at that still point
where all roads lead.

ALAN KING

quasimodo in nyc

Winter yanks her breezy hem
over New York City. I beat the streets
like a mad man haunted by what rattles
in his head,

or a mad man shaken by a Gypsy woman's
loud "No," when she snatches her hand
from mine. I'm a man leaving what he desires
at a hotel in Time Square.

And I might be scary the way insecurities
surface like warts, the way passersby stare
at the weight of what hunches my spine.

Maybe what I need is a poem
as pretty as Esmeralda,
but one willing to hold the head
of something ugly
and kiss it beautiful.

ALAN KING

green

An empty wallet
gapes from the dresser.
On the floor, pants pockets
turned out. Shrugging:
Sorry, nothing here.

You fed those lines to a beggar
outside the Chili Bowl, and to a guy
who rolled up on your car
at the traffic light with a squeegee
and a bottle of Windex.

It's been months since you were laid off.
The job—several circles of hell
that would've broken even Dante.

Now, you get ransom letters
instead of benefits. Your resumes are letters
in bottles bobbing to wherever prayers
take them. Even birds seem to cackle,
and trees shake their leafy-green 'fros

as if you were a boy
watching the deft hands of a con.
Opportunity—the little white ball
under those plastic cups.

pictures

*Hey, Looky yonder.
Tell me what you see.
Looks like Handsome Johnny
With an M-16 in his hand,
Marchin' to the Vietnam War.*
– Richie Havens, “Handsome Johnny”

i.

In 1982, I bought a house in a swamp. Not a house really, but sort of a cabin. But not really substantial enough for a cabin. More like a large screened porch. Back in the Tallahatchie swamps northwest of Tupelo and east of big Sardis Lake was a smaller lake called Harris Pond. I never did find the entire thing even though I lived on it over a year. I couldn't get around at first. Swamp phased smoothly into wetland, which gave on farmer's fields, which merged with water meadow, which gave on open reaches where the great blue heron ruled and death had a sharp beak. I think the edges on the map were entirely arbitrary. Whenever I asked directions to Harris Pond proper, I got a different set.

I bought ten acres from a farmer named Benton, which included the fish camp. Benton took me there in a battered john boat powered by the oldest living Evinrude motor. It had taken well over an hour to get from his back pasture boat dock to where we were going.

A sandy hill suddenly lifted up out of the bald cypresses and I could see a structure on the rising ground. The scrub willows, water oaks and river birches had been cleared for a good way around an L-shaped building. At the foot of the little island—not more than an acre itself—was a boat dock with a little shed. Everything was in good shape. Benton liked to fish and had spent a considerable amount of time and money there.

The cabin—house, whatever—was built on 5-foot piles with the long side toward the dock. It was empty except for a neat stack of old mattresses in the middle of the room, a dilapidated trunk full of rough GI blankets and a pot-bellied wood stove from the 1930's with brass scroll-work like an old safe. The short part of the “L” was a locked storage room of heavier construction full of extinct fishing gear. There were screened windows along the entire length on both sides. No electricity or plumbing. It dawned on me, looking around the room, that this island was probably the only part of my

ten acres that wasn't under water. That was fine with me, even though I don't fish. I watch birds. I photograph birds.

I'm kind of retired. I actually retired quite early and I've liked it that way. I was 32 when I bought the place. In 'Nam, I'd been a medic. Not a very lucky one, though. I'd been shot squarely through my right knee on the first patrol, within the first minute of stepping into my first paddy. It was a real mess and they cut me loose. I've had 4 operations, but the damn thing's still as stiff as righteous pride. Finally, they gave me a 10% disability. I got my RN and did hospitals for 9 years. I'd *joined* the Marines in the first place to get money for medical school, believe it or not. I don't know what I was thinking about.

I got divorced in '83. She just up and walked out one morning in May. May 14th, 1983. Went back to her people in southern Alabama. She'd said, "I'm tired," and just packed her shit and left. I let her go. I was tired, too. So what was there to keep slaving for? Listening to their nail-biting and bitching and filling out endless forms down at Nashville Baptist Memorial? I'm a quiet man and I have no ambitions other than my present work. For recreation, I like a book and I like a drink and a rubber or two of bridge, not that anyone plays anymore. Do you play? See.

I had other plans. I wanted to become a nature photographer. Really. Birds had been my hobby forever. I'd spent \$500 one time on a complete run of *National Geographic* I found at a used bookstore. God, Sheila had bitched. I wasn't getting any younger and with her gone, this seemed like a great time to start my life all over again, whether I wanted to or not. Something I've had to do a few times, I'm afraid. I'd had bedpans and debriding up to here and I didn't want anything to do with it for the rest of my days. I don't know why I went on and got into nursing. It seems that I like the human race less and less as time goes by. This part of the country was home, so I moved back from Nashville and got a duplex a little south of Memphis, over the Mississippi line.

I bought a Hasselblad 500CM body and began getting accessories out of the backs of magazines. The first thing I did was put hummingbird feeders outside my back porch. Pretty soon they started buzzing up and I clicked away. I photographed hummingbirds for the next year, living off my retirement. Then I sampled the National Geographic with some and they came back wanting to do a full article. "Suburban Hummingbirds." That angle. I was a made man. People calling me on the phone.

Benton tied off to the dock and we walked the property. He ran on with a broken cattle salesman's patter about red-eared bream, largemouth bass and sweet channel cat. There was a love light in his eye, but he coughed continuously as he spoke, one hacking retch after another. And gestured with a Phillip Morris Commander between his first two fingers. I wanted the place instantly.

We went back to the house and sat on the tall flight of steps to talk money. We settled on a figure. Lower than I thought I could get it for. He didn't have much heart or wind for bargaining, it turned out.

It was perfect. So few things in life are ideal, but it is possible to do a perfect thing. To get a perfect shot. On Monday, I began to move my things in just so I could get in the habit of going back and forth. It took almost a sixth sense to get there even with a marked trail. I got lost every time I went out for a week. I finally got some pretty good maps from the National Geologic Survey. There's something sad about that, you know. The whole world's *gridded*. There's not a single bit that isn't on a map somewhere. You couldn't lose a snow flake. Now they have personal locators that can pin you down within five meters of any place on earth and give bearing and distance to wherever you want to go. And they do radar maps that look ten yards below the surface. Big Keyhole satellites up there that can look straight through your body. The old cartographers didn't know how lucky they were to be able to write, "Here there be dragons," on the edges of their maps. I think, anyway. Would you like another drink?

That weekend, I spent my first night. I got to the camp about five and settled in for the evening. The swamp is in business 24 hours a day so it was like listening to the evening shift come on, the birds calling to one another as they passed a biological punch clock. The night came down with a great burning in the west and a heavy, narcotic drowsiness got on me, listening to the buzz. I lay down on a mattress and fell instantly asleep.

I woke in close dark to a tremendous chorus of tree frogs. People think the country is quiet, but nothing could be further from the truth. The country is very loud. At least 100,000 tree frog males within ear shot were screaming for love. You'd scream too if you could only get it one week out of the year. I lay for a while listening to the great organic throb while my eyes adjusted to the dark. I got my flashlight and went outside. I didn't even put on my pants.

The moon was high and bright and world was a million shades of night. The air one clear shade, the water another, each individual tree another. I walked to the western edge of the island where the willows and river birches were thick and shown my light up. Hundreds of tiny eyes looked back. I went back and got my handy Nikon with a micro lens and spent an hour trying to photograph tree frogs by flash light. I actually got some good ones. It was nearly 2:00 when I gave it up. I pushed through the grove to the water's edge and looked at the swamp.

Out in the reach, the great black shape of a bat was skimming over the surface, eating mosquitoes the size of starlings. I watched as it flitted and

searched and finally melted into the night. As I followed it, I saw—I thought I saw—very far away in the west, a single, dim, yellowish light. But even as I watched, it disappeared.

ii.

I moved from the duplex and rented a two-bedroom in a tiny town called Red Banks, about 10 miles northwest of the camp toward Memphis. The front of the house was downtown and the back was in the country. Small place. I had converted the second bedroom to a dark room where I processed my first batch of film from Harris Pond. Like I said, I got some bitchin' tree frog pictures. One you may have seen of a pair in full mate, an unmistakable look of froggy ecstasy on their slick muzzles.

But the last frame on the roll was the one I was the most interested in. After a great deal of tweaking, I got a decent print and took it into the living room. I poured some Scotch and took my magnifying glass and sat in my old leather recliner to try and make it out. It was a murky and very underexposed 8' x 10', but there was definitely a spot of light in the middle of the frame. Fuzzy-edged and indistinct, just a smear, like a very distant galaxy. What? Methane? Aliens? Ghosts? Commercial fishermen? Poachers? Marijuana farmers? What?

I don't think I've ever been happier any place in my life than I was at that camp. It got to where I couldn't stay away. I bought a gas generator and installed it in the strong room. I ran cable and lights. I got a composting toilet out of *Mother Earth News* and built a little open shed for it where I could look down the reach while I was having a sit-down. I laughed about building a *firebase*. I bought a case of Deep Woods Off in the economy size pump. I was limited in what I could bring in by the size of my boat, but I managed to get a couple chairs and some cinder blocks and boards for shelves and a table out there. I also went ahead and invested in the latest computerized Canon with a camouflaged 200mm lens. That damn camera could read your mind.

I had a huge anhinga, the primitive impaler. He worked the channel north of the island, big as a turkey buzzard. I called him Vlad. There were purple callinules, common moor hens, and least bitterns in the cattails and shallows, picking their way across the hydralia, the purple lotus and the white water lilies. The boss great blue herons were everywhere with the snowy and great egrets. There were torpedo-shaped green-backed herons along the banks, motionless as yard jockeys, and great pileated woodpeckers in the trees. It was a birdie bonanza. I went farther and farther from the firebase in my Wal-Mart john boat. I felt pretty safe with my maps but it was hard to escape the feel-

ing that someone who was careless could get seriously lost. The swamps seemed infinitely big and extensive, though it could only have been ten miles across at its widest. It was very long, though. You moved through it at a reptilian pace, one primal scene gradually replacing the last: a sand bar covered with huge mussels as long as your hand with bright purple, iridescent lips, insurmountable snags that would bar the passage for years. In the spring there were hatches and the night turned white with mayflies and in the fall the water was chartreuse with duckweed.

I shot and explored, but developed back at the house where I could control the temperature better. Three more times I saw the light in the same general direction and once photographed it with my 200mm. I got a reasonable picture of what appeared to be the sharp prow of a boat with a Coleman lantern hanging above it. Fishermen, I guessed, and didn't give it much more thought.

I had been there almost a year. It was spring again and I was very excited because I'd seen a small but unmistakable flight of wood storks fly over, going west. If I could find the breeding site, I had another feature. This was way the hell north of their natural range. I'd go for something like "Endangered Species Adapts," or "The Legacy of Habitat Destruction." That sort of thing. I'd been looking for a month and if I didn't find them soon, the breeding season would be over. The game warden was no help and I asked every farmer I knew around Harris Pond, but no one had seen the slightest evidence of wood storks, who are unmistakable even from a good distance. I could only think they were very deep in the interior somewhere in the country east or south of Sardis Lake. Which would figure since they're extremely shy and sensitive. Little as you might think in so large a bird.

It was just evening and I had made my way back from one of my longest searches yet. I always made sure I could get back before dark. I was tying up the boat when I looked out over the reach and there the light was, much closer than it had ever been before. It nodded along the far bank, slowly coming my way. I stood on the dock and waited. Silently and smoothly, the boat approached. In a few minutes, I could see that it was a long, narrow, wooden boat with a recurved iron strap mounted on the bow from which a lantern, tuned very low, hung out over the water. Behind it, standing up and poling the boat, was the glimmering, ragged figure of a man.

When he was in earshot, I called a greeting and stood my ground on the dock. The boat whispered along side with a little *thock* each time the pole hit the side and I could see him clearly in the light of my own lantern. He was thin and tall, could have been any age above 40, with a grizzled beard and pale blue eyes that were almost white. Cool as a winter sky.

“Evenin’,” I said.

He leaned his pole and smiled at me from under a battered, soft hat the color of motor oil. I wanted to like him right away. I had the instant impression I was looking at a Matthew Brady print of a Southern rank. A man fed on green corn, sour apples and whiskey. I noticed he was wearing a pistol. An old Combat Commander with a broken handle.

“Howdy. Evenin’ to you.”

Standing in the boat, he had the stillness of a tree trunk. He was about six feet tall. His clothes were a combination of army surplus and country rag. He was barefoot and along the inside of the boat was a four barbed fishing gig lashed carefully to a bamboo pole and in an open creel at his feet were three nice bass.

With the cautious hospitality of the country, I asked if he’d care to come up. He stood for a moment thinking, it seemed, and then tossed me the end of the rope. I made it fast and, with a light, sure movement, he was beside me on the dock. I extended my hand and introduced myself, “Willis Stone.”

“I’m John Potter. Glad to meet you. We’re sort of neighbors.” He made a vague gesture in the direction he’d come, west. “I heard you bought this land and I wanted to ask if I could fish over toward your place.”

“You’re the light I’ve been seeing. Sure, it’s fine with me.”

I asked him if he’d like to come up to the camp and have a drink. He nodded and we did. In the house he studied the pictures of birds that I’d hung on the walls. When I handed him his bourbon, he asked, “You take all these? I recognize some of the places.” Then he paused in front of the stained photo of my training unit. I don’t know why I kept the thing. I wasn’t in the Corp more than 9 months, but I had. And right beside it was the little frame with my Purple Heart and a Bronze Star, the caption reading: for conspicuous bravery in the face of the enemy.” They’d handed those things out like popcorn in ‘Nam, but I could never bring myself to throw it away. They said I had drug a couple of guys out of that paddy before I passed out. But I don’t remember it.

“You were in-country?”

“Yeah.” Coming up beside him.

“Which unit?”

“Fourth of the First Marine.”

He smiled. “Jarhead.”

“You got it. I was a medic. I didn’t see much action, but I saw enough. Plenty, really. You in country, too?” Acting a pride I didn’t feel.

“Yep. 2d of the 5th Marine. 3 tours. When you there?”

“‘71.”

He shook his head. "I was there '66 to '69. You ever up around I Corps?"

"No. I was only there, in the boonies, for a week and a half. Then they shipped me back to Subic, and then home."

"We was around Hue a good bit." He extended his had for me to shake and nodded once, firmly.

I told him what I did for a living and that seemed to please him a great deal. We had another drink and he told me he "had a place" about 6 miles due west. That would really be deep. I had arranged a little living area, and we sat across the coffee table and drank, mostly in silence. I brought up the subject of wood storks and asked if he might have seen any.

"Great big white birds with black coattails and heads?"

"Yeah. Bare-headed. Like a buzzard. About 3 and a 1/2 feet tall. Like to nest in tall trees."

"Yeah, I seen em." He drank. His Adam's apple bobbed a deep stroke.

I explained my situation and asked if he could guide me there.

"Sure, but it's a long way from here. Take all day. I'll come back and get you sometime."

"When."

"Soon."

I didn't want to try and pin him down any more. He'd gotten up and was studying the photos of the anhinga, peering very close. I asked if he'd like one.

"That the one just down a little bit from here, ain't it?"

"Yeah, that's right."

He looked at my pictures some more and finished his drink. "I gotta be gettin' back to work." He laughed. Slivery. I noticed he was pretty much all over grey.

I gave him a print and walked him back to the dock and I marveled as he took up his pole and stepped nonchalantly back into the pirogue. I watched him light his lantern. Greedy, I asked again when we might be able to go see the storks.

He looked up and asked, "What day is it?"

"Wednesday."

"Wednesday. Well, Corpsman, I'll tell you what. I'll be back Friday. In the morning. You be ready." And he laughed. A good laugh. Clear and silver again.

He moved off with no more noise than a man stirring a glass of tea and was swallowed by the dark, but I stood watching the light weave and vanish and reappear and finally disappear for good among the dark verticals and masses of the swamp.

iii.

I got all my stuff together Thursday night. I was worried he'd come back in the pirogue and I wasn't sure how much I could get in so I fussed around until late and finally put together a pack I thought would do. I lay down to sleep about 12:00 and fell right off.

He scared the shit out of me. I felt a hand on my shoulder and came up off that cot like I'd been shot from guns. Like puffed wheat in the old commercial. Fighting mad. There he was in the middle of the room in his rags and belts and .45. It was 2:30. He'd be by in the morning. Right.

He was laughing. "Settle down there. It's just me. We got to go. You ain't ready, you asleep. I tol' you to be ready. What if I'd been Charlie? Mr. Charles sneakin' in here. Come on. It's a long way. We'll get something to eat at my place."

I pulled myself together and followed him out into the dark. Sure enough, there was that hand-shaped cypress pirogue looking about as wide as a wisteria pod on the black water. I put my pack in the middle and after he got in the back I crept gingerly into the front, nearly tipping us over. Soon the light from my camp was completely gone.

I have no idea how he navigated. I couldn't see anything and in just a couple of minutes I completely lost my sense of direction. We poled through dense thickets and around 100 nameless islands, down clear reaches studded with the gigantic broken hulks of bald cypresses, big around as houses a tornado had twisted off. Now and again a coot would scream and startle me every time. Toward daybreak, I saw a little spot of yellow up ahead. He polled noiselessly closer and I saw that it was an island like mine. A little larger, maybe. We drifted up to a narrow floating dock mounted on oil drums.

"Leave your stuff. My ol' lady'll get us breakfast. We don't get many visitors," then he laughed.

We went up the path to the highest point on the island and there was what I can only call a "hooch." A large, octagonal board and thatch structure on stilts stood in a compound of out-buildings. Three spring-loaded yellow mongrel dogs bounced on the dock, alternately yapping and snapping at the one alongside. As I watched, a small figure came from the gloom of the house and stood on the top step, drying her hands with a rag. She was small and dressed in black pants and a white shirt. Her black hair was caught in back and thrown over her shoulder, her shirt kindled in the sun.

"That'd be my wife. Name's Minh Chau."

He tied off in no particular hurry and Minh came down the steps, after

pausing for a long moment. She stood patiently in front of the house. John and Minh embraced as if he were returning from a long trip. He spoke to her in soft, musical Vietnamese, moving the glossy, pure black hair from her face with the palm of his hand. He turned and gestured to me and spoke more Vietnamese. Then he said to me. “Minh don’t speak English much. I just introduced you.”

Minh separated herself from John and, wiping it first on her pants leg, extended her hand, which shook a little. It was golden and strong and I felt an alien pattern of calluses across the palm and slender fingers. She bowed us into the hooch, which was large and had a number of interior walls, but no doors. It struck me that they lived in a house without doors. There was a loom in the corner of the big room. Around a large, central fire pit that vented through the roof were reed mats. We walked over and sat cross legged around the fire and Minh fed us a fish stew in colored plastic bowls and we all ate sticky rice with our fingers from a larger one. The low sunlight of dawn slanted through the entrance, turning it all gold. Minh worked the pots that rested in the ashes. She was a great deal younger than John. Close to twenty years, I’d imagine. She was beautiful and as slender as a cattail. I asked John if I could take their picture and he and Minh conversed softly.

“Sure.”

I took up my Nikon and shot a couple of pictures of Minh and John. but he turned away when I wanted to take more.

“Let’s just try to remember it,” he joked. “You finished? We got to go.”

Minh walked us back to the dock, chattering to John like half a billion other wives around the world when their husbands go off to work, whether it’s in a swamp or a factory, the dogs bouncing around her legs and whining pitifully, wanting to go so bad.

We poled off into the west, the sun warming our backs quickly. I shot picture after picture in the flat light and regaled John with natural history, most of which he seemed to know already. After about four hours, we landed. Whether island or river bank, I never knew. John said, “We walk.”

Unerringly, he lead me to a trail that’d I’d never have found in a million years and we were soon forcing our way through the dense jungle. I was cut to pieces by thorny vines that John never seemed to encounter. The temperature climbed steadily and the humidity in those places never varied from the 90-100% range. We were both dripping. In a little while, the path petered out altogether and John started to break trail with the machete. After another half hour’s hard going, John turned around and said, “We’re almost there. Get ready and be quiet. If you make a lot of noise, they’ll fly.” I checked the equipment, and hefted the Canon like a grenade launcher. We crept forward and

in a little while the undergrowth began to thin and I started to see droppings. A few steps more and we began to see dead trees and I could hear the shrill cries of fledglings when the wind was right. At that moment, great shadows flew swiftly over us and a flight of three storks banked in. I could see gleaming white patches on the forest floor up ahead and I smelled the rotten fish stink of the rookery, the air bright with ammonia.

Your wood stork resembles nothing so much as the Martians that plagued Bugs Bunny in all those cartoons. Great black and white birds with tiny, naked, scaled heads like cane handles and a down-curving black beak 7 or 8 inches long that shades to yellow at the end. Their wing span can be 5 or 6 feet. At the very top of a huge bald cypress were ten great, untidy nests of sticks. Above the rims, I could see the cane handle heads of chicks. I counted 13 chicks and one nest abandoned. Storks are poor breeders. They're so shy that they'll abandon a whole nest tree with eggs if the activity level around them gets too high and they seldom raise more than one chick in a season. It looked like this bunch was working hard.

I took almost 200 pictures that day. I had the big magazine on. We worked our way around the rookery, John on point through the underbrush like a ragged, Confederate ghost. When I was out of film and we slipped away to the boat. Which didn't seem as far off as I thought.

We finally back at his place. The dogs were there but Minh wasn't around, which didn't seem to bother John. "She's out takin' crawfish." He got his lantern, gig and a small mesh bag with a casting net in it. I tried to give him 50 bucks but he wouldn't take it. "You do somethin' for me some time." say he. I was back home in Red Banks by 9:30 that night, exhausted, cut to ribbons, eaten alive by robust insects who were apparently not impressed by Deep Woods Off and laden with loot.

iv.

I made out like a bandit with those pictures. I sold one batch to NG and another to the Smithsonian. The Sierra Club bought some for their calendar. Maybe you saw the one of the big female feeding two chicks that they made into a poster. I decided I needed a vacation and went to the Bahamas for two weeks in the off season. I toyed with underwater photography, but my burst ear drum made diving painful. I got some interesting picture of shore birds, though. More abstract compositions than wildlife photography. I had a couple of good drunks and two sunburns. Got my ashes hauled by copper-colored woman in Freeport.

I came home at the beginning of July and began a series on swamp plants.

I spent less and less time at the house in Red Banks and more and more at the fish camp, although I didn't work as hard as I had. I found myself just hanging out and spending the day slowly sailing through the swamp with my little trolling motor. I rose and set with the sun. I saw John several times and we had drinks in the ritual manner. And I would see his light in the evening or the early morning and that seemed good. It dawned on me that he didn't sleep much. There wasn't anything special about this time except I was becoming more and more of a swamp creature. I even got pretty good at finding my way around.

I made it out to John's one time and frightened Minh who stood on the dock and shook her head vigorously and pointed off into the deep swamps west, "No here. Johnny no here." She did have a little English after all. I had prints of the pictures I'd taken of them with me and I held onto the dock as I passed them up. She studied them very seriously, her hair falling over her face. When she didn't say anything else, I started to pull away from the dock. She looked up then and said, "Thank you." She had a pretty, shy smile.

The summer passed on and fall came in and the swamp was sugared all over with the pale pink cast of crown penny vetch. One day I saw the flight of wood storks headed southeast. Great looping bands of ducks went over, and geese very high in tight V's. The air became crisp and the cypress let go of its leaves. The rains came. The water level rose, blotting out all the trails and channels.

One night in early November when the water had submerged the low southern tip of my island and I was worried about it, John came to my door. It was 2:00 in the morning, again, as usual, and I was sound asleep. In my dream I heard him calling from the water and his voice seem to be that of my father. I was already awake when I heard his footsteps on the stairs. He didn't pause to knock, but came right in, striding to the side of my bed before I could get the light on.

In the circle of my little bedside lamp, he squatted down as I sat up. I could smell him there in the stillness of the cabin: a mixture of wood smoke and fish and dark water and sweat. Strong. And fear. His face was mask and I could see the muscles moving along his jaw like moles burrowing under a yard.

"Minh's sick. You got to come out and look at her."

"How sick?"

"I don't know. Fever. Bad. She's burnin' up."

"Sure, sure. Let me get my kit." I always have a fully stocked, semi-illegal medical kit because of what I used to do for a living and because I'm clumsy. The stiff knee gets me to fall down a lot. I pulled on my clothes and we headed for the dock, John running swiftly and me limping behind like

Chester humping after Mr. Dillon, my flashlight weaving a wild arabesque in the trees. We loaded in and John, paddling this time because of the height of the water, shot the pirogue away from the island as swift as a moccasin shoots out from a bank. Faster than we had ever made it before, we were at his compound.

Minh lay on a mat beside the fire. I went over and sat down heavily beside her. I put my hand on her forehead and it was as hot and dry as hell. She was unconscious and at close intervals a cruel shiver shook her from end to end, making her feet flutter like the tail of a fish. I pulled the blankets back from her child's body. All three dogs stood ducking their heads in the entrance and whining. I looked her over and couldn't see anything. But when I took her right wrist to get a pulse, I saw it. In the exact center of her right palm was a furious, dull red puncture wound like a small volcano. A streak of crimson an inch wide ran all the way up on the inside of her arm to the lymph gland in her arm pit, which was as big and hard as a hen's egg.

"John, she's got blood poisoning. We've got to get her into town."

"Can't you do something for her?" Like ripping metal.

"I'll do what I can, but we've got to get a drip started or she'll die of dehydration. Her blood will get so thick her heart will stop. We've got to get her to a hospital. Tonight." I looked up into his white eyes.

I shot her up with all the penicillin I had, praying she wasn't allergic, and cleaned and sterilized the wound. There was a tiny fish bone deep in it. John was throwing things into a fishnet bag. A ripple of agony passed through Minh and she woke wildly up, half sitting in bed and speaking clear, rapid Vietnamese, her eyes open, but not seeing us. She tried feebly to get up as we both held her, slapped our faces with her wet, heavy hair and struggling like a dove in our hands. Then she stiffened and threw her head back, mouth open in a soundless shriek. Then she went limp.

We laid her back on the mat and I felt for a pulse. Nothing. Her pupils were blown and black. She was dead. Her heart. John groaned when he saw her eyes and fell back on his butt. He cried like a baby: completely, uncontrollably, as if he could go on forever, the tears hanging in his salt-and-pepper beard, his bald head bowed between his knees, his hat between the old roots of his bare feet.

And I cried too. Maybe because I thought that this is what I had gotten away from. That I thought I had escaped being an attendant in death's wash-room and that, with my camera, I had entered the service of life. But I saw now that I was wrong and that John and Minh and I could pretend all we wanted and look the other way as much as we liked and live as deep and far away as we could get, but nobody can hide. Nobody.

I closed her eyes and pulled the sheet over her face. The dogs made a pitiful howl and the bitch took a few steps into the room, her long tongue searching for words in the impossible mouth. How do they know these things?

I went over to John and put my hand on his knotted shoulder. “She’s gone, John. We’ve got to get her into town.”

John said, “No.”

V.

Here. Here, look at these. I don’t usually show these to people and I’ve never put them around. But look at this. Great lat on that side. Look at the shirt. Tricep and forearm in maximum contraction. The ax just a blur. You get shots like this of pro golfers. And there she is in the background.

What happened was he went to one of the outbuildings and came back with a bolt of heavy canvas. He built up the fire and put a large pot on to heat water. Then he asked me to leave for a while. He’d call me back. I went down to the dock with my pack and sat cross-legged watching the sun come up, the dock rocking gently beneath me. I fished around in it and got out some cheese crackers, a pint of Jim Beam and my Nikon. And loaded it. This is what I do. I sat there and watched the sun come up, blood seeping between the tree. Then, later, much, I think, I heard chopping.

I got up stiffly and walked toward the sound, bottle in one hand and Nikon flapping around my neck. I was drunker than I’d thought sitting down. Beyond the compound at the end of the island, I came on him. He was clearing a space near the water with an ax. He didn’t say anything or even seem to notice I was there. He moved like a slightly damaged robot but swung the ax like a pro. Above us, back in the woods a little—I’d seen it as I came down—lay Minh Chau as a trim canvas bundle carefully tied with jute cord, resting on dead leaves among the spindly trees..

When he’d cleared enough to satisfy himself, he turned around to me and asked if I wanted to help. I nodded and extended the bottle. He took a pull and put it there on that stump. We trooped to his wood pile and loaded up the wheel-barrow.

It took us an hour and a half to build a level, latticework pyre—taller than waist high and wider than a double bed—out there on the improvised beach. Then we went back and got Minh and a 5 gallon can of gasoline that was with her. I carried the can and he carried Minh in his arms. Strange procession, that one. It had clouded up and the light was cut. Rain.

He carefully arranged her on the wood, making sure she lay straight and tidied up around the area. He had discarded his hat and his grey hair fell

before his pale eyes as he worked, wood chips in it. He stood back and regarded his work, then picked up the gas and poured it over everything, shaking out the last drops on top of the corpse. We backed away and he threw in a whole book of lit paper matches. The pyre exploded. Heat slapped me in the face like my mother mad at me. We retreated back up the bank and Johnny sat down on a fallen tree, me beside him. I drank more bourbon. My stomach crawled like big ants were in it. I was seeing spots by this time. I was sweating in the cold. But every once in a while I'd press the button on the camera hanging from my neck without raising it. That's how I got all these.

We sat there on a log, cold wet creeping up the crack of my ass. At first the fire burned black from the gas, but after a while it settled down to a clear, steady, wood-burn with a tall, white column of smoke that the wind snatched and blew away North. We'd moved a lot of wood. All Johnny had left for the winter, I guess. Ash and red oak, mostly. The open latticework let the air in and the whole affair burned very hot, bright tongues of blue jetting out from the volatile gases in the wood. Pops and snaps as loud as gunfire. After about half an hour, the center with it's sad load, fell in, as it was designed to do. I wondered where Johnny got his body-burning know-how.

The fire flared up and burned fiercely for a while more, sparks arcing off and drowning in the dark swamp water like planes flaming out in the South China Sea. Sometimes they floated for a moment, the embers suspended on black glass like stars in the water, before they sizzled and went out. Johnny drank and I drank with him, gas to our own fires, fuel for thought. We waited a long time, the dog coming silently through the woods and laying at our feet. Then we walked down to it.

This is the last one. Can you see it? Lower left-hand quadrant. You can barely make it out in the coals and ashes. See the fire in the orbit? It was afternoon by then. Johnny just stared at the pile. He turned his head slowly and looked at me with a wild, spooked-horse eye, but didn't say a thing. He turned around and walked back toward the compound and I followed him. As always.

On the dock he shook my hand firmly and told me to go to town and tell the Sheriff that things were taken care of out here. He'd be in in a few days to talk. He told me to take the pirogue and that would have been alright, but when I got out in the swamp, I drank some more and I must have passed out. I got lost. For three days. I finally came out on some farmer's back door looking like one bad Robinson Crusoe.

I still get down there some to fish and shoot sometimes. But not as much as I used to. It's just easier to work up here. I see the light every once in a while. And I guess it's Johnny. But I haven't seen him since.

JENNA DEE

cosmology

There are water bottles sitting in a cart
at Primo Cappuccino at Penn Station.
The cart is crooked and the wheels
are unaligned with the tile floor.

Each low-held bag or nervous umbrella
shifts the cart farther from the counter.
The suspense is maddening. The poor
aesthetics of the unstraightened wheels

were enough to put me at unease. And now,
as the gap between the counter and cart widens,
the cart is on track to depart the café and arrive
at the Amtrak-only waiting area by noon.

However: I take the practical perspective
that in no way would anyone would allow the car
to be far enough from the counter to obstruct the way.
As my impatience grows, I long for an especially wide set of hips

to come over and bump the cart, break its steadfast inertia.
I long to ask the man who mops, *what will it take for you
to put the cart back against the counter?* If the looming gap
between the counter and the cart is not enough to scare him

into putting the cart back against the counter, he must be waiting
for a specific event, perhaps a sneeze, as a sign to put it back.
He extends good will to me by lifting only the chairs around me,
and not the one I sit in, to mop under the table.

I reflect on the straw wrapper that fell into the crack
that I had planned on leaving there since no one could see it
anyways. What an onerous task we have before us,
keeping the universe together this way.

MARIE GAUTHIER

after the sheep

O what became of you,
little boy, blue, once lost
to summer's black thrall?

You must be middle-aged
by now, steel in your hair
& boots, a belt-slung belly—

Back when thick heat
twanged curls at your nape,
sweat dried & hardened

to small geodes of salt—
a planetary garland
the Jacks & the Peters

blink clear eyes by, & crinkle
their immaculate noses. Nameless
boy, are you sleeping, still?

Did you ever wake?
Or were you, & the mineral
bones of your story, tilled

into the fields, the harvest,
into something both less
& more intimate?

MARIE GAUTHIER

blood lust

He sucks in a furor to fill his mouth's
canyon, sweet pearls pooling in the yeasty
folds of his neck. Every other minute
the scarlet maw breaks off with a squall—
air bubbles stab his belly nothing
like air, air he swallows with every
gulp & cry, until the milky river
returns to me in a tangy clotted flood.
There's a reason why a baby's not
born with teeth, with arms & legs strong
enough to traverse the length of his crib—
once the dugs were dry wells, he'd
hold this empty vessel of flesh
& bite until the spigots flowed red.

MARIE GAUTHIER

labor day

The living move in long-winded waves
as if through glacial tides

while the slow lathe of the carousel
creaks its send-off to summer.

Horses, gilded dust billowing, eyes
sand-scuffed mother-of-pearl,

bow to the children, to parents
hefting their lithe charges.

Everyone takes her place, hits
her mark, relinquishes his ticket

for this season's last ride, mechanisms
crusted like salt along the bilge.

As the axis cranks piano sweet-talk,
small bodies ease in their saddles.

Smiles alight and flit across their faces:
an astonishing flock of radiance.

IRENE KORONAS

listening for emily

I

what would you have me do,
forget sunrise, the ripples
that gather in pools on rainy days,
the pollywogs deep in wooded meadows
or the blah blah blah on sunday morning
before neighbors try to sit quietly-

of course I remember the touch
of every day
of oranges in pewter bowls
of ironing boards in kitchen closet
the pretense of smooth

II

sleeping on hard mahogany bed,
pillow cases' cut lace edge,
the windows misshapen
leaded glass, pain distorts my view-
watching see-saw riders,
robins, the peaking noise

III

how odd for this late hour
when usual people sleep-
if only I could hear them
before they disappear like crickets
or grasshoppers deep in field
their chatter explains nothing
not even our time

IV

fascicle opens the sky, where once
childhood was present

I never was young, never
was I young

SEAN CAMPBELL

the body farm

Toss this carcass in Knoxville, per my will.
When I die leave me drying on sprinkled grass,
an unashamed odor in a humid season:
keep me in the sun
exposed, unfurling like meat—
there was little of me in it,
and nothing left for me after.
Per my will hand me to science, find me
a place on the body farm, where they'll time
the remains, watching the fingers unzip.

PETER SCHWARTZ

there

come pepper the ordinary
earn salt with your hands
camouflage's dirty work

but the trenches are glowing
and it's there that you'll find your
most indigenous mountains

your fauna and fixtures
your dry salvation, there you'll
learn movement doesn't

need punctuation, there you'll
give up that precious separate
the catalog of wrongs

you carry like a scarecrow
everywhere you go, there
you'll see how the heat

of every possible sequel
burns into the ozone with
or without you, there

you'll learn that
truth is only truth
by residue

GRAHAM HILLARD

between the body and the mind

She makes no distinction between the body
and the mind and tells me so, defying me

to posit the limbs as subject to a will
not their own, a shard of permanence strapped to them

like a parachutist's pack, the veins conduits of what,
if I'm right, must be some real meaning. This is

what frightens her, this disentangling of lusts
from their means, the weight of what might, after all, be

choice, as if one could take the body apart,
part the ribs, unwind the fat guts and find

at the end of them a human voice praying
to itself.

GRAHAM HILLARD

if my body were

If my body were clay
and shaped by some
restive hand, would I
feel the lingering
impatience as a wound?
Here? Or here?

Then again, why
not make it flesh,
soft ground?—this
strange movement, this
cacophonous sound.

to love a persian

When Dr. May went to Iran with Nori the first time
they draped her face with black silk so rich
she didn't know if it was an indignity.

They put gold bangles on her wrists and brought her to the souq
where it looked as though the lunatic butchers had put hand grenades
in the cows. She sat where the women prepared the evening meal.

When I suggested you and I go to Iran, you told me
you couldn't return for never having served in the army
and I wondered how they would recognize the four-year old
that walked on a plane. Sitting up in the tree of my own safety
I thought of the rose gardens of Shiraz and certain tombs of men
who declared that they were god and were stoned.

I thought of the grandmother who might not despise me and of
the golden cups that hang hooked inside each other
in stores where tea pours one pot to another and water
from the air into a mouth from a spout slender as a throat.

Observe how true the parabola of the water is, like the prophet's voice
traveling towards Khadija's, saying, what is it you think I ought to do?
My property, my elder, my darling.

When we went to the track at Saratoga and made fun of the hats,
I sat looking at the sycamores shedding their noncommittal
bark of late August, thought about trips abroad from which one
does come back, trips where people disappear, and those from which
we decide we will not return.

JASMINE V. BAILEY

traveling to texas

I will go there to bury my dead,
a dark-haired girl in a red dress
wishing for an afterlife
of wine and Spanish music.
Her hair grows long as the border.

I will stuff large hats and stiff boots
in her young woman's tomb,
families and a mariachi band
for her new business of dancing.
There is no one in hell to interrupt her.

Handsome men cluster patiently
around the edges of the dance floor
to ask her for this dance or for a dance
in twenty years, the snaps
of their shirts mother-of-pearl.

They carry handkerchiefs in case
they ever sneeze, which they won't,
they have handkerchiefs to wipe
a little dust from her chair, should she
ever sit, though she won't;

the handkerchiefs of the afterlife
are always ready to be used.
She dances with a vaquero
she came specifically for, awkward
and happy, these are things

for one reason or another
life did not permit her.

SHARRON SINGLETON

earth will split in half

in Two Months! is the headline
of the tabloid at the supermarket.

Refusing to walk the hard terrain
of our heartbreak we sometimes

flee to an alterworld—*Fairy Caught
in Mousetrap!* and *Alien Bible Found*

in Boston's Big Dig! It must be true
that extra-terrestrials experiment on our brains

while we sleep allowing us to believe
the impossible, that in Puget Sound

the bodies of dolphins with their eager
sonic chatter are now toxic waste

because of the PCBs they've ingested,
and that hunters shot and killed

the only grizzly bear seen
in Germany in the last 100 years;

so somehow it doesn't seem unlikely
to read here in the grocery line

that *Elvis is Running for President!*
and I think as a dead person he might

have as good a chance as anyone
of holding this cracked world together,

especially if he teams up with
the *Ninja Librarians in New York!*

because as the *Weekly World News* says,
there's more coming—much, much more.

SHARRON SINGLETON

a man who cooks

A man who
pours me wine,

feeds me
slices of pear

from the tip
of his knife

can have anything
he wants,

as meat falls
from bones

in the stock pot.

DANIEL HUDON

tracks

three toes
with a prominent middle
my palm
larger than

like hands
in wet cement
graffiti

from another
era
exposed by a road construction crew

decades
ago
before I was
born

long
strides
or standing still
for a moment

on their way
uphill
toward the old
volcano

long dormant

though a few
around

emblems
of time
fading
in a few

more years
the ranger says
they will be
gone

J. A. TYLER

how it is that Jimmy, he goes, when everyone is sleeping

The crush of rocks was on Jimmy's mind, and the wind was blowing. This was a summer hotter than any other summers, and Jimmy, he didn't know if this was because it was a summer hotter than all the other summers or if it was because this was the summer where Jimmy, he was finally paying some attention.

His father, Jimmy's, he was stiff in the grass tonight, connecting the stars. Jimmy's father, not breathing. Jimmy's father on top of the space where his wife, Jimmy's mother, she is buried, underneath the worms and the soil.

The rest of weight on shoulders. The wrestling down of how it all feels.

The night is cool, the wind drifting ships in the wombs of Jimmy's imagination. He is looking for a kind of peace to wash over him, to run in him, cold water and sinking. Jimmy smells rain but it is his hair. And Jimmy, he feels shivers, they tackle the length of him, but the waves are in his head and the rip of the shore, it is his own breath.

The lawn soaked in thoughts. The house quiet.

Jimmy and his father, they have stilled the world, they have paused it all, and his father especially, he is at a moment that will go on and on, a death, the rigor of limbs growing. And Jimmy, smiling there at his father's open hands, both ready to hold on to something.

Breaking open the ground Jimmy digs and the hole that he makes becomes a canyon he is looking down into and his father, laying next to him, eyes closed to the sky, Jimmy connects his stars. The yawn of darkness is without clouds tonight and the air is calm. Jimmy is calm. He shovels, the nose of the blade digging through it all. The dirt that lifts, it rakes the words from his head, leaves him empty for a time, blankets his synapses in black sky and dwindling worry.

The rocks that come out, he makes a pile. All the rocks from out of their ground, from out of their mouths, the heaviness of speaking foreign languages

to each other when there is no one to translate. Their hands their communication. These rocks all the splashing condescension, all the missed opportunity, all the stepping away from one another.

His father doesn't say any more words and Jimmy remembers the last, when his father's chest exploded and his hands quietly opened. And Jimmy would swear to anyone that his father, he was holding pieces of her, his wife, Jimmy's mother, and that was the smiling face that he died with.

But Jimmy didn't tell anyone, Jimmy has kept this all to himself. Jimmy is full of secrets.

There are no good words Jimmy knows to tell someone that someone else has died. There are only stories. And Jimmy's favorite, the one he tells to himself, is that he once caught a fish that was his mother. That is a story that Jimmy, he never gets tired of telling. He can picture her eyes, his mother's, looking from out of a fish head, reflecting the water, fins like arms in the posture of a hug. Fish kisses that Jimmy, he never bores of telling to himself.

The rocks make an unexpected stack, bigger than he had envisioned, warm still from the day's sun, and the depth of the hole is perfect. Jimmy can see the side of her box, his mother's, and though he doesn't want to open it, he will, and an ocean will come slipping out.

There are no birds at night and Jimmy, he thinks he hears a bat swoop dive punch, but it might just be Jimmy and his ears going out again, replaced with a river static, a rush, and Jimmy finishes his digging.

Jimmy's father has the house keys in his pockets, his wallet and all their money in his back pocket. Jimmy's father has the ring on his pinky. And Jimmy's father, he has the imagining of a heavenly kite in his head, because Jimmy put it there, when he was resting his boy head against his father's cooling one, and thinking all of the good thoughts he could, crying, a sea pouring out of him.

There is so much water tonight for this dry town, Jimmy's town, the place where until today, until tonight, Jimmy he lived.

There are no words for the world. There are no sentences he can build, Jimmy, to save himself from how this, it all works. He dammed his future

with a song that no one had ever heard, and the dam, it broke open, came tumbling out.

Jimmy pries open the box, groping with blind eyes, shutting them tight against everything, and he smells in the air what it must smell like when dreams, they are dead. But this darkness in the box and the scent of his mother, not like how his mother should smell, not like rain and cotton candy but like hope vanishing, that is not how his mother should smell. But it is enough for Jimmy, knowing they can embrace, to make him turn his back on their time. To make him fill it all in. To make him go on.

His father down in the hole, lowered with hands that are Jimmy's, with hands that are the size of a man's palms, a man's fingers, the dovetail of manly knuckles and ragged nails, visible prints worn to the skin, down beneath the easy surface of usual living.

Jimmy puts his father by his mother, and Jimmy sees on their imagined faces, his eyes closed again, the look of smiling.

If the sun sank to the lake it would make a sizzle, going out, like a candle extinguished.

Jimmy he stands in the dark and holds his man hands on his boy hips, half in and half out of himself. Jimmy nodding up at the sky, crying more rain than he knew was in him, howling but only in his head, where no one can get to the secret of rocks or his gone father, so that no one has to feel what Jimmy he has felt since the last winter came and took the floor out from under him.

Rocks of all sizes, weights, the feel of the world on Jimmy's shoulders lessening as the stars, they shine, a sun sometime soon coming up.

Shovelfuls of dirt and his father's face is camouflaged to the earth, to the ground, his rigid open hand stuffed into the open side of a box, where Jimmy knows there will be the only kind of solace that exists for them, for his mother and his father, both now more dead than alive. His mother and his father, both now separate from how it is that he, that Jimmy, still continues to live.

Open caskets, open hands, Jimmy and a shovel burying the world.

Crickets turn on and off and Jimmy, he hears them, even with his deaf ears,

listens to them running the music of their bodies through his, until his knees he feels them shaking and has to go on. Another shovelful. Another shovelful. Another shovelful.

Jimmy, he thinks that he should be drunk, like his mother was when the end came for her, barreling down tracks. But Jimmy, he doesn't drink.

His head whines but he doesn't open his throat.

Jimmy sings.

And tonight, Jimmy, he sings out loud and the neighbors will think it is just a tree of locusts, because the sound that Jimmy makes, it is not a song but static crying, a vibrating hum, a decay. Jimmy's song is a nail going into a box, a mother with numbing insides, a father reaching into the darkness for her, the heart in his chest first broken and then deflated.

Jimmy puts the rocks in his pockets. Jimmy puts the shovel in the shed. Jimmy puts the stars back in the sky.

A river runs beneath them, his mother and his father, well-sprung for the drying death, down together now like they want, Jimmy on his own, to do his own, his mother's voice in his head saying not the water Jimmy, not the shore. And Jimmy, his father too now, the sad thrust of his voice, the screamed words before his ribs went in and couldn't reach back out, before he went looking into the silence and the pitch black. Before he scrambled down an indefinable ridge, down in to the waters below.

Jimmy with all the rocks in his pockets and Jimmy with one star in each eye, a constellation of finish, a groping towards the end.

Jimmy walks. Jimmy goes. Jimmy will watch the sun rise one more time, and then Jimmy he will find out a new song, a new pitch, and will move from being how he is now to being something else entirely.

Jimmy, rocks his only weight, he turns his back on the ground that was his mother and father but is now only dirt and struggling lawn, the uprising roots of a tree, and the black dissolves into purple voices, the sun bringing back the summer one more time.

JOSEPH GOOSEY

trying to examine what's inside of a building

I had four people,
one for each limb, carrying me
out of the pink house.

They kept telling me
that back home
near the water there was
somebody I was attracted to.

I didn't know
who they were talking about
or what language they spat or the way
back in.

I wanted to be rubbed on
in very innovative fashions.

I wanted to paint dark circles in the afternoon.

I wanted fries and understanding.

The four people tossed me onto the grass
and I tried to tackle them
but couldn't stand or run or breathe.

In the morning I was lathered in grease.

What seemed delicious was only raw cement.

in line at the welfare office

He wanted to tell that woman behind the glass window she had failed: morning supplication on the edge of her tongue had been worthless. Tell her she was wrong about his brothers from the barrio; they weren't in his bed because of the engravings of Andrew Jackson in his wallet; tell her he was worn out from praying to Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz while immigrants were shamelessly gunned down on city streets. Show her he grew wings on both sides of his temples, and unless something was done about the ban on same-sex marriages in California, he wasn't voting in another election.

*in line
at welfare office
rejected haiku*

His Social Security benefits were not enough to pay next month's bills. He wanted to break the piñata. Write *rengay* about pancakes and frogs in fish tanks. Write about his lover's naked body imprinted on white sand. However, he was sixty-five and barely managed on his own. Sixty-five and afraid his bed was no longer a battleground.

*starfish sprawls
beneath the full moon
she hogs the covers*

JOSEPH DORAZIO

lapidary

A Quartz contentment, like a stone—

– Emily Dickinson

An Opal refinement,
Fires cast by final gasp
Though never having breathed;
A Jasper enchantment,
Love neither lost nor found
But bound within its veins.

You and I shall not possess
Such hardened satisfaction,
Commanded as we are to flit
And flicker until destiny
Suspends our lives—
Like fossil flies in Amber.

ten gallon hat dance

what so at twilight i cries a yeeha all melancholy & so deep blue lugubrious like cuz i forgot all about my sense once those hairy skank-roots bounced lively thru our dude ranch turning our quiet desert rose home to one of the thorniest, green tumbleweed factories ever to take root in this Gust slinger's Okay Corral; i'd been rollin' so fast my blisters chapped under the sun all grinning sinister yellows on us till we flipped bitch-like, all of us ranch hands with long silver pistols licking tight wads of so long cowpoke ever' which way cuz this gaga Ms. Lala of the Huge Hacienda tosses a rodeo sombrero into the midst O' the SHIT: bullets clanging louder than the game of horseshoes rattlin' around in my head afore i'd got so spanked on peyote i saw myself countin' the air ripples spinning off those wads of so long cowpoke as Ms. Lala throws off her raiment so white she must've skinned lightning & poured all the whitehot grease on some ungodly spool cuz' that ten gallon hat glittered with them panties so wild with knotty filigree i 'bout flooded the ho' damn garrison with jizzum while she swang those glug a lug jugs like dos round, cheek-soft rockpiles capped with snow made to glow a warm pink under the late night motel sunrise creeping up o'er the snake-neck curve o' the valley in her glad ass a-workin' circles in the air lasso style with all us cowboys trigger skipping our six shooters making that raspberry liquid squirt out in hog-snot uneasy streams into our leather boots this serious night the firefigt blasted the handle bar mustache clean off my choppers along with a hunk of my shoulder as Ms. Lala kept dervishing as if she were a whorehouse fountain gushing all gifts of sick life to me, the one hombre covered in the blood of the dead and the still breathing, who set out to lay in the dirt with all that good woman-ness & forget 'bout what the hell ever' one thinks the goddamned mornin' is.

JENNY GRASSL

what is lost

Rage, rage against the dying of the eggs!

Each egg brought you desire,
desire's wine of an uncertain year, of a predictable proof, and a bouquet like
cypress; its fragrance conjuring the browned hillsides of the Toscana, the
piazza horses of Siena, and Cranach's Eve in the Uffizi.

Each egg brought you desire, desire,
desire's lipstick on lips gorged with sensation or the promise of it, in it, as it
comes to the kiss; desire's lack of lipstick after kissing.

Each egg brought you desire, desire,
desire's Bohemian repartee, its dearth of torpor, its seventh heaven miscount.

Each egg brought you desire, desire,
desire's maxed-out credit card wardrobe—the outer face of the proffered
eggs, the tribal dance paint, the plume and crest of the bird.

Each egg brought you desire, desire,
desire's beach blanket sprawl, the sun entering pores as though to widen
receptors of feeling, heat, taken into desire's core,

and in the peak and trough of waves, desire's eggs pooled and swirled in
water, water, eggs afloat

or taking root as
pearls in your oyster bed, harbored
in your pelvic cove
where gulls, cormorants, and osprey fly
and feed, and jewelers steal;
eggs die and disappear with each under-the-boardwalk-sigh.

Each egg brought you desire, desire,
and desire's bad boys in fast cars who would only marry virgins, those queen
keepers of the eggs, chilled eggs; now, at this late hour, even their eggs
evaporate, take leave.

Each egg brought you desire, desire,
desire's lost intellectual baggage, its ripe hung cucumber vine and dreams of
pickles.

Each egg brought you desire, desire,
and desire's money, its honey, its vainglorious self, its abetting mirrors,

its scented comforters taking the print of the body like the Shroud of
Turin, the body spent and spending, impressionable, this body impressing
itself in the comforter.

Each egg brought you desire, desire,
desire's last barroom call, and desire's rutted groove love song, or digital
signal repeating, the over and over of it, the melt in your mouth, the blur in
your eyes, the rapture-in-your-brain chords... the love song torment
surviving so long after the loss.

Each egg brought you desire, desire,
desire's hairstyles teased, straightened, curled against your grain, the allure
of more, the beehive, the mane, the bob; a lock of hairstyle for him, the
sure shorn tress, memento of the eggs.

Each egg brought you desire, desire,
desire's drenched cellular bliss, desire's thirsty tulips looking for the rain in
Eric Clapton, the dew in The Grateful Dead.

Each egg brought you desire, desire,
desire's marked down necessities: time, love, time running out on love, love
running out on time.

Each egg brought you desire,
desire's moist southern hemispheres, its liquid joints and political
generosity.

Each egg brought you desire, desire,
desire's irrational love of a phone number, a metatarsal tingle, its Paradise
herbology, its camisoles and boots, its clear vision in a mist.

Each egg brought you desire, desire,
and desire's shoe horn sense, ah, love's first disagreement, masked with

more fantasy candy, bonny blue skies, its snaking traps and endless caverns,
its bitter greens on a chipped plate, its long, long colds and influenza.

Each egg brought you desire, desire,
desire let go from the hundreds of thousands of eggs entrusted to you at puberty.

Each egg conspired, inside your blood-rich nest to welcome desire, desire
feeding on the dying of the eggs.

O Easter, O bubbles on a ring,
O cooking and cleaning and feminine making,
O transparent colors and bunched balloons!
O lavender-scented dryer sheets,
O ears and silk of corn,
O tubs of butter and cow creamers,
O feathered masks at the ball,
O monsters *maybe* under the bed,
O sultan's pillows,
O Picasso nudes,
O thong underwear,
O nature crafts,
O letter 'O',
O openings everywhere,
O lilies and trumpet vines,
O one-eyed hat stares,
O ovum,
O mother,
O stranger,
O eggs that brought children
O girl-child, heiress of the eggs

and now for you the death of eggs is done and you feel the whimsical weave
of the nest, hanging inside you, secure by a straw to a stalk suspended in
emptiness...

you feel the nest's art, its assemblage,
the poignancy of a bit of blue string,
a warp and weft of language fragments.

Ovarian failure.
You don't like to fail.
Fertility popped like so many
iridescent bubbles; atresia. Cell death.

In your youth, creation was mandated inside you from the microscopic
to the organs, the willing, the oh so willing limbs.

The menopausal landscape dims. Birds migrate, leaves crisp brown. Gypsy
moth nests
wait to glorify destruction. Those rotted eggs now rattle their dryness.

Fallen, the millionairess' egg empire.

Hang onto shreds of estrogen!
your sagging face has lost too much of it
watching the unfathomable moves
of your hands
without the usual
instructions.

ADAM TAVEL

jim crow's talk show premieres

In Hillsborough I spit melon seeds
 into the Tuckahoe's blue vein
 &amp eye them as they float
past the shack of my mother's wet nurse,
 its floorboards the lone memoir
of her bruised nipples leaking.

 Surprised I speak like this?
After the first commercial break
 I'll pluck my banjo—it's wound
to C, key of Clementine & fireflies.
 Please don't finger that remote—
 there's a camel pageant on channel 47

but lips alone can keep you entertained.
 Would you like to hear some Pat Boone?
 Perhaps a joke
about what to call a black man
 with a PhD. I think you know them both
by heart. I think you pour

the fulsome bronze of my mother's skin
 over your strawberry waffles.
 I think you gape
like a Sarasota gator
 as you stammer breakfast grace
&amp fork her in your jowls.

SAMUEL LOVETT

watermill

The rivers thawed in March that year,
seasons churning round around
like cumbersome wooden spokes.

We hid in one of the sheltered corners
on the low floor of Spear's grist mill,
listening to the water rushing
chutting through the watermill.

Steady rain had fallen for weeks,
pelting the hard earth before gathering
and rolling down to join the flow.

The wheel turned faster
as water moved more urgently every day,
descending from the tearing hillsides
of dark vales and hidden gorges.

We were alive with a pressure that swelled
and ran wild through the northern woods
surging and spreading in search of open spaces.

It beat and crashed like a roaring anger
among the rocks, a nervous tic, a shiver
in your knees, that fluttered in the dark
and fell like your fingers, in my back.

The searing tip of your nose
ripping at my cheek
like water so hot it feels cold.

le rire

You should know we slept together once, a few years back.

Darcy was highly psychosomatic and suggestible. She'd been dating a guy who would break out in hives on his arms and neck when he was stressed out. They had a fight over a pickle. At a diner she'd growled at him when he went to reach for hers. She said afterwards she was joking but he didn't believe it, thought the sound indicated some hostility so deep it brought forth a howl of primordial anger such as must've shook the antediluvian forests. Love had yet to be invented in prehistoric times, he said. So you can imagine how that growl made him feel.

She went home feeling confused and itchy. She discovered to her horror that her entire body was covered in raised red patches. She looked like a living mosaic. In a panic she called me and I rushed to see this medical curiosity. Her door was unlocked as usual. The bathroom door was open too and I saw her in the tub, bathing in cool water.

"I'm sorry," I said, turning my head.

"What did you see?"

"Everything."

"Then you might as well come back."

I didn't expect her words and I was surprised at how quickly I followed this advice. It was as though we'd suddenly become two other people, as though like the hives on her slender body, we were imitating the symptoms of other lives. She looked odd and beautiful under the water, a tiled pool come to life.

"Does it itch?"

"Really badly. They feel weird, too—here, touch one."

"Where?"

"Anywhere, they're all the same."

I knelt down next to the tub and with one finger pressed an elevator button-sized hive under her left nipple. It was smooth, flushed. I grazed her nipple as my hand rose from under the water.

Before I knew it we were on her bed, the water dried but wet with sweat, breathing hard. The bumps disappeared one by one, kissed, grunted, heaved away so that I only got to see her true nakedness after her climax, when sexual desire was gone. We lay back side-by-side, silent. I left a few minutes later.

You might say it was just stress relief that cured her condition, but I

felt a sense of miracle about it, a magic transformation, a lifting of a curse.

That night Darcy's boyfriend killed himself with a gun nobody knew he had, gotten from a place nobody knew, which is also where he went. She found out the next day, but at midnight, which is roughly when he did the terrible deed, she thought he'd broken into her room, naked. He stood at the foot of her bed paler than the moonlight. She said his name—believe it or not I've forgotten it—and he growled at her and vanished into thin air.

So we never discussed our one fling. I'm not sure about her but I felt guilty. We never mentioned the suicide either. She made a joke once, though, that if she should die she'd probably haunt someone too. If her body had copied his, why shouldn't her soul?

She learned that everything is replaceable. Her life went on and she dated again: Blind dates, singles cruises, one workplace romance, three barfly one-night stands.

But these erotic endeavors failed. The laws of this universe having let her down, after a despondent period she made the first of her many journeys to another world where she found Michael.

They'd met on a flat planet whose edges forever expanded so there was no chance of falling off into space, a universe where ample calculation was allowed for every decision as though Time Itself had been slowed down to suit the reasoning-ability of each of the various inhabitants, a triumph of shared subjectivity such as Hegel never dreamed: the Internet. I preferred to exchange fluids before information and bars for my liaisons, dark places located on maps, whose walls were unmistakable and uneven faces equally dishonest. Admittedly, all the relationships I'd started in bars had ended. But what else is something supposed to end with but an end?

Darcy's and Michael's was an old story: Smiley emoticon meets smiley emoticon. Messages are exchanged in chat rooms discreet as upper West Side bordellos. Kissing emoticon meets blushing emoticon. Photographs are rush-delivered by electronic cherubs flying past the speed of heartbeat. Their emotions eventually deplete the field of available emoticons and they decide to leave the flat world and rendezvous on the round one. A bold move, interplanetary travel having numerous risks too arcane to predict and few surviving the transition from two dimensions to three.

They made it alive. She said she loved him. I didn't even like him. A bad friend, I said nothing.

I could tell you about the first time I met Michael, but I'll pick the fifteenth, because the first fifteen were the same:

You know how people stare at your shoes on the subway and you don't

mind because their glance is so far from your face there's no chance of confrontation or embarrassment? Michael's eyes were like my shoes, and not just because I wanted to shove my feet in them. They had the neutered impenetrability of any pair of brown, dull straphanger's boots.

It wasn't who he was but rather who he wasn't that disappointed me. He was a 404 Error, Page Not Found. He made no effort to know me, often not even saying hello when I entered the bar or restaurant where we might meet on a weekend. He sat next to Darcy with a hand on her thigh, his shoulder always touching hers as though they couldn't stand without each other while I smiled and couldn't stand them. My friend had changed. Where she'd been carefree and loquacious she'd become silent as an empty playground. She spoke when talked to but rarely initiated the interesting conversation we used to enjoy. There was a little art-house movie theater in arty Park Slope called Le Rire (judging by the movies they carried, the name must've referred to Bergson rather than comedy) that we used to go to at least once a month, but she'd stopped asking me what was playing. I had the sense she was always waiting to leave our get-togethers, giving them the feel of drab family functions for fourth cousins. It drove me crazy, and friends should be people who have an unspoken agreement to not drive each other crazy.

Some changes were external. She'd dyed her hair from blonde to black. It wasn't just a color but an Authorized Personnel Only sign hung on the locked door of her soul. Had Michael said, you'd look good with black hair, had she blindly indulged his whim? To my mind it made her resemble what's-his-name's ghost more than anything.

The sixteenth time I met Michael I decided to stop being a bad friend and let him and Darcy know what I thought of him.

It was at Cliffhanger's bar on Spring Street. The Kinks played on the jukebox. Sunny Afternoon, and it was.

I got there early, ordered a Bass from the bar, put three dollars in the jukebox and sat at a low table by a vast but filthy window, taking my beloved Rubik's Cube from my coat pocket. Each side was yellow and divided into six rows with the same number on each cube. Thus when the puzzle was solved, there would be six 1s on one side, six 2s on the next, and so forth up to the last side with six rows of 6. I hated numbers but I enjoyed shuffling them as though they were incapable of combinations, as if they were discrete bits of the world like apples or cards and couldn't turn complicated on me. I liked to put 1 and 1 together and get two 1s.

The barmaid was cute, a cross between two different girls who never liked me and a third unidentified woman. She brought my Bass over to a

low wooden table covered in a white noise of carved initials, obscenities and glyphs that could function as both. Was F.U. Frankie Ulrich or something more rebellious?

"I haven't seen one of those for a while," she said, pointing to the cube I thoughtlessly fingered.

"Yeah. My friend Darcy once told me she'd heard working on it till it's solved helps relieve tension, so when I'm stressed I whip it out."

"You've solved it?"

"No, not yet."

"How long have you been at it?"

"Almost ten years."

"Try to enjoy your beer," she said.

I was about to. Then they came in.

Darcy waved at me and went straight to the women's room, leaving me alone with old shoe-eyes himself.

There were many free seats near me but he was looking across the room, and deliberating where to sit. I stood up before he could act.

"Hey, Michael, I need to talk to you."

"Okay."

"Listen, I've tried to talk to you because Darcy is such a good friend of mine, and for a long time. But I think there might be a problem between you and I. And that's a problem for—"

He reached into his jacket pocket and produced a small black plastic dodecahedron with twelve large red buttons, one on each face. I recognized it as the Orbix, a sophisticated electronic puzzle with four game-play options—way too many for me to handle.

"Wha—"

"—It's an Orbix."

"I *know* that. What're you doing?"

"You can still talk."

I watched him, confused at his project. Was he more like me than I thought and if so was that why Darcy liked him? I imagined he was an alternate-reality me, my manual Rubik's Cube changed to a battery-operated light-flashing device.

Each time his fingers pressed a red taillight-plastic button it glowed.

I clutched my puzzle, shifted rows.

111346215...

"So I think you don't seem to want to talk to me, you know? So I—"

A victory song of beeps interrupted my speech and heckled Johnny Cash who sung, "I don't care if I do die, do die, do die, do die..." "All the

Orbix's lights were switched on, indicating he'd solved a game. Michael's thumbs fiddled with some other buttons to change to a new puzzle configuration. He played on.

Was the whirring globe in his hands an entertainment or something more rebellious? A middle-finger substitute?

We stood head-to-head, looking down at our hands, pushing buttons, sliding cubes into random numerical patterns. In our stance and concentration we were like men at urinals.

233336111 ...

The Old 97's Salome came and went with Cheap Trick's Heaven Tonight on its heels. Michael had solved three of the four Orbix possibilities.

I was feverishly determined to get one side of my cube in a finished pattern.

444444446...

I was almost there when another electronic anthem programmed in a Japanese factory made me lose my flow.

"Let's go," a girl said.

I turned around to see Darcy looking over my shoulder at Michael.

"Okay," he said, switching the orb off and returning it to his jacket.

We'd been standing there for three dollar's worth of jukebox time. She'd probably been gone for just two choruses and a coda.

"Hey," I said.

"Hey."

More an echo than an acknowledgement.

"I'm just going to the bathroom, be right back."

When I returned they were gone.

I left a dollar and my cube as a tip. It was displayed the next week, fully solved behind the bar between two unopened vodka bottles as though these were poisons best left alone. I would continue to order Ketel on the rocks. But I never saw that barmaid at Cliffhanger's again.

I learned that some things aren't replaceable. And the years went by, and I thought of Darcy less and less until I was left with a few scenes: A night at Le Rire where she fell asleep and started talking during a film about people talking during movies, ignoring the people telling her to shut up; a time we decided to have lunch in Bryant Park during a blizzard and her French onion soup froze so we ate it like a slushy, and especially the day I soothed the disquiet of her suggestible body, the moment we lay naked together, not talking, not laughing, merely breathing as though that was reason enough to meet.

Some people appear only to give you a piece of vital information and then walk off stage forever. They seem an amateur dramatist's construction designed to speed your story along. I met one of these "friends of a friend" as they are more commonly called, at an unhip coffee shop in unpopular Bay Ridge.

He introduced himself and said he vaguely remembered me from a Halloween party Darcy had thrown in college. As he sparked my memory, I recalled she'd went as witch and considered actually dyeing her hair black for the occasion, but I'd talked her out of it at the last moment.

Apparently Darcy and Michael were living together. I took a chance and asked him if he had their number and was surprised to receive it. I put it in my cell phone. He said good-bye, walked toward a door labeled EXIT, and I forgot his name before it shut behind him.

I called them immediately. Michael picked up. I knew it was him because he didn't say anything.

"Hi, is Darcy there?"

"No, who's this?"

"Hey Michael, it's Mike."

Silence.

"I was just thinking about you guys and I hope you're doing good. I was just wondering if you could tell Darcy I rang."

"I can do better."

"Oh, great. What's up?"

"I can tell you where she is and you can meet her yourself."

"Thanks I really appreciate it."

"She's at your old hangout, Le Rire. Eight O'clock movie."

I hadn't been there in ages.

"Thanks. I—"

Dial tone.

Was she trying to revisit our past? If so, she'd need me with her because it belonged to us both.

I got to Le Rire at eight-thirty. It took me a minute to realize it had been turned into an adult theater because the name remained the same—probably because any French sounds dirty to the vulgar American mind. Also, the marquee read "Wetter Gnomes and Hardons" which could easily have been a no-wave cinema flick. But it turned out to be some sort of midget-orgy shockumentary. I wondered if Le Rire had new owners, then realized they couldn't be the same people even if their names were unchanged.

I guessed if Darcy had shown up she'd probably left, blue movies not

being her thing. On the other hand she'd changed since Michael. I took a chance, something I hadn't done since the last time I'd seen Darcy.

I was embarrassed to discover the girl at the ticket window was the cute ex-barmaid from Cliffhanger's bar.

"One ticket, please," I said, trying to look abstracted.

"Hi," she said, "It's you."

"Hello, it sure is."

"I did it, you know."

"Oh? Did what?"

"The puzzle you left me. I solved it."

"That's great. One ticket please."

"You know what I did?"

"No."

"I took the stickers off, then I re-glued them back so each side was all the same numbers."

Why didn't I think of that?

"Then I quit Cliffhanger's. You were right, it relieved a lot of stress. I thought, look how fast I solved that puzzle. What am I worrying about, being afraid to leave this bar? Something else will come along. And if it doesn't, I'll make it happen for myself."

I nodded, looking at a poster behind her of dwarves in bunny suits on ladders performing oral sex on each other.

"One ticket, please."

"Here you go."

I took out some money but she waved it aside.

"You go in free. Enjoy yourself."

I followed a familiar hallway to a closet-dark world, stinking like a public restroom, full of bedroom thoughts. The floor was sticky and it wasn't spilled soda.

The room, my pulse flickering, I searched for Darcy. The theater was half-empty. It was mostly men, bald, middle-aged. A few slurped from glass-necked bottles in paper bags. But in the back row I spied a girl with black hair. Her face was in her hands. Her shoulders shook in time to a funky wah-wah on the film's soundtrack. She was alone.

I sat down a seat away so as not to scare her. She didn't look up. She was sobbing.

"Wait," I said, though she'd done nothing.

I went back out to my friend at the ticket window. She was giving change to a man with gold teeth grinning like a harp and a mop of zero-gravity hair. He brushed by me and moans escaped the theater as though

the black door he'd opened was electrical tape on a torture victim's mouth that was quickly stifled once more.

"Hi," she said, glancing at me. "How can I help you?"

"I need some tissues."

"Excuse me?"

"I need some tissues, do you have any?"

She turned her face from me, began filing her nails.

"Gross. Look, I let you in for nothing. Don't start thinking I'm going to help you mop up your white knight army."

"What? Oh, no. I just—"

"—Watch the movie or go."

I went back to Darcy's row. The man with the harp grin had sat at the end of it.

"Excuse me," I whispered to him.

"Tissue?" he offered.

"Thanks."

"Thank me *later*," he said and I slid by.

"Hey," I said. "What are you doing here?"

"You can't touch me," she said, breathing hard.

Her words stuttered out like water from a sprinkler on some random timer.

"I won't touch you."

"You *can't*."

She stifled a cry, face in hands, hair draping hands.

"Why did you come back here?" I asked.

"I don't know. I did it like I was sleepwalking. I'm talking like I'm dreaming. Why did you come here?"

"I wanted to see you."

I heard the guy next to me muttering and glanced over. He was mouthing the dialogue to Wetter Gnomes and Hardons, low but distracting as a man praying in the exhausted quiet of a rush-hour subway car.

"Watch the movie," she said.

"No, listen."

"You listen. Watch the movie or go."

I lifted a hand to touch her shoulder but remembered my intangible promise.

"I'm leaving a tissue on the seat next to you," I said. "For your tears."

"I don't want you to see me again."

It was a funny way to phrase it, as if like a painting she lacked the ability to look back and was the purely passive part of our (purely) visual

relationship.

I felt it had been a mistake calling Michael and going back to Le Rire. Now I would remember Darcy in this sad, enigmatic way. But when I left and the girl at the ticket window ignored my good-bye, it was even worse thinking how I'd remember me.

Our oblique conversation would've been perfect in an art-house movie. Maybe we had revisited the past. Only now we were on the wrong side of the screen.

It had rained. The black street was slick and shiny as killer whale. Traffic lights blinked red, green and yellow in alternating combinations like a puzzle spread across Brooklyn, too large for me to ever solve. I dragged my feet back home.

My cell chirped.

Michael's number.

I picked up, said nothing.

"Mike?"

"Yeah."

"Have you seen Darcy?"

"Yeah."

"So, how long has this been going on?"

"Well, it's over. But it lasted about two minutes. No, maybe it was three."

"Don't be a wiseass."

"What are you talking about, you told me to meet her at the movies."

"I was lying."

"Nice talking to you too," I said and hung up.

Chirp, chirp.

He was master of the irritating electronic song.

"What's this about?" I said.

"I just saw Darcy on the street with someone who looked an awful lot like you. Then you disappeared."

"Look, it wasn't me. It wasn't her, either I'm pretty sure. You're calling me about a whole lot of nothing, which, come to think of it is the communicative counterpart to our usual face-to-shoe discourse."

"I don't know," he said. "And she wasn't at Le Rire, I'm sure."

"No kidding, and why not?"

"Did you see her face?"

"Yes. I mean, I saw her hair. And she was dressed like Darcy."

"What was she wearing?"

"I can't remember, it was dark."

“Are you drunk?”

“What was the Darcy you saw wearing?”

“It was dark on the street too.”

“Did *you* see her face? Or mine?”

Silence.

“I thought so. Did you check the Internet yet? Maybe she’s in there.”

“Looks like one of us has seen what he wanted to.”

“Or *didn’t* want to,” I spat.

Two days later Michael called again. I was going to tell him fuck off but he sounded the way humans sound when they've been devastated, voice strained as though held down by strings, as if one more word might snap them all and leave him mute, and I couldn't bring myself to shut him out.

Darcy was missing. He hadn't seen her since the morning of my call. He begged me to please let him know if I knew where she was. Even if I was sleeping with her, he didn't care as long as I could tell him she was okay. Of course I had to be honest. I had no idea what happened to her.

For a few months he'd phone me every few days. I'd let my message answer. Then I'd check. Maybe he'd found her. But he never did. Then one day he stopped contacting me. I'm sure he thought she was dead. Each call he'd made was a prayer to some non-responsive god. I felt my silence had destroyed his faith in ever finding her.

But I thought I knew what had happened. As I turned over our last conversation at Le Rire, it changed from art-house to ghost story. She *had* died, somewhere unknown, by some means unknown, and that's where she'd gone too. And she chose me to haunt, just as what's-his-name haunted her those years ago. Michael had only seen someone who looked like her by his apartment. Oh, perhaps he'd been granted some kind of premonition, seeing her form in another's. But though our meeting was less than happy, and maybe she'd decided it was a mistake, still she'd made the mistake with me in mind. I didn't find this supernatural event hard to believe because I'd experienced similar miracles. With my own eyes I'd watched her body heal under my hands.

I mourned.

Then one June day I was sitting alone at an outdoor café in unspeakably expensive SoHo. I wasn't bored but not engaged either, as though the wind was blowing amusing jokes through my ears which I had however heard a thousand times before.

The sidewalk was cobbled with cloud-rounded sunlight. I watched the patterns move to the wind when a shadow fell fast as a net across my face.

Darcy had cast it there.

It was she in the flesh. There could be no doubt. She'd stopped right before my table to fish in her purse for something.

Her hair was blonde. She looked good.

"Have you ever gone back to Le Rire?" I asked.

She looked up, incredulous. I could tell she found this unusual way of saying hello stranger than the fact of seeing me again.

"God no, not since it became a porno theater. Did you know that?"

"No, I had no idea... so, where are you going?"

"To see my boyfriend."

I raised my eyebrows as though this was surprising.

"Peter," she said as if it explained everything and nothing needed explanation and it was tiresome to provide it.

"You left Michael, I guess, without leaving a note."

"Michael—Oh, that was a long, long time ago."

I wondered if he'd agree.

"You were a long time ago, too," she said. "I feel like I'm looking at a ghost."

I laughed and she looked at me as though barred from a private joke—which she was—that look half-insulted, half-amused in anticipation of learning the meaning. But she dug back into the purse, found a folded piece of paper and opened it. It was a printed e-mail of rendezvous information. She read it and put it back.

"I've got to go," she said. "Running late—you know me."

No, I didn't. I'd never understand her, never get how she decided one man was her friend, one her lover, one a stranger, or which category or categories I fit into. Had I been shifted from one to another, or had I always been kept in a single place in her mind? Or perhaps Friend, Lover, and Stranger were just words I used to make sense of myself, words which, if I spoke them to her, she'd have answered with that silence that was her version of the static between radio stations, which seems always about to reveal voices that yet never materialize.

I opened my mouth, about to say "What... "

Shut it.

Enough, I thought. Better to let the silence stand on its own as something that is, rather than become a void where words should be, sad and empty.

I put out my hand and she extended hers. I touched her and she touched me.

Then we released each other once and for all.

I didn't watch her walk away. After she was gone I took out my cell and

called Michael. I knew his number by heart, from those many desperate times it appeared on my old phone, a random sequence of digits adding up to nothing as if pulled from my unsolved Rubik's Cube. Luckily he hadn't moved over the years and I got his machine. His recorded message sounded weak next to the triumphant Orbix-like beep that punctuated it.

"She's alive," I said. "You can forget her now."

He answered the phone.

"Mike? Is that all?"

"No. You can forget me, too," I said, and hung up.

summer help

Lily is tall for fifteen. Her feet hang over the armrest of the wicker couch. She lies still, a novel propped against the faded floral pillow on her stomach. Horseflies butt the screen of the open window. The air is sour, blowing not from the ocean, but from the marsh. The fan clicks as it rotates from the girl's legs to her face and back again.

"Lily!" Phyllis calls. "What are you doing in there? I need a hand."

The girl sighs, rises, and stomps into the shop that occupies the extra sitting room on the ground floor of her aunt's house.

Phyllis looks up from a pile of disintegrating cardboard boxes. "The shop is open until five. How many times do I have to tell you? I expect you to be out here or at the register until then. Got it?"

"Yeah. I'm really tired. I couldn't sleep last night. This house is too creaky."

"It's because of the moisture in the air. The wood expands and tightens. I think it's neat, kind of like the floor boards are talking."

"Well, I think it's creepy, just like that weird noise outside my window."

"Oh, that. The raccoons tore into the garbage again. You have to put a rock on the lid. Remember that."

"Do you have an answer for everything?"

"Just about. Now, you take a book, clean it off, and put the price right on the inside cover. Why don't we say ten dollars?"

Lily pinches the spine of a moldy paperback. "You really think someone is going to buy this?"

"Absolutely. It's an early edition. And I don't want to hear you complain because the whole box is like that."

"Oh, poo," Lily says, wiping green fuzz from the cover. "These are disgusting."

A serious girl, Lily's mother had said on the phone. *A creature wise beyond her years*. Phyllis isn't so sure. Lily is lovely, certainly: all legs and long black hair, with a pale oblong face. She's savvy too. When Phyllis was her age, sun-block was unfashionable, but Lily slathers herself from ears to ankles. The first thing the girl did upon arrival a month ago was comb through Phyllis' bookshelf. "You don't have enough Austen," she said. Surely she gets top marks in school. And yet, she doesn't listen. Every day Phyllis finds Lily on the couch instead of the register. "Get to work!" Phyllis tells her. "You think you can sit around like a goddess all day and the world will grovel at your feet?" What

Phyllis doesn't say is that, for those legs, the world probably would.

Lily plucks another book from the box. "*Sense and Sensibility*," she reads. "These are good. I wonder what happened to them."

"Those boxes came from Mary Eaton, of Eaton Books," Phyllis says. "She lives on Fairgate, right on the edge of the pond, and has a flood every couple of months. I keep telling her not to put anything in the basement, but you know these old women."

Lily laughs.

Phyllis holds her breath. Could it be that, to Lily, she's one of them? Is thirty-five no different now, than seventy?

"Yeah, I know Mrs. Eaton," Lily says. "She's always trying to get me to read those Harlequin romances."

"Don't fall for it," Patrick calls as he carries a stack of mahogany chairs into the room. "Where do you want these, Phyl?"

"Right where you are is fine."

He sets them down. "It's stuffy as hell in here," he says, wiping his face on his front shirttails.

"You want to know where those came from?" Phyllis asks.

Lily rolls her eyes. "Do we have a choice?"

"The man who sold me those chairs inherited them from his great-grandfather. He was a Shaker. See how the back is like a ladder?"

Lily doesn't look at the chair, but at Patrick. "You want to go for walk?" she asks.

"Sorry, Lil," Pat replies. "I've got my hands full. Besides, it looks like you're working."

"She is," Phyllis says. "I was just reminding her, the hours of the shop are nine to—"

"Come on, Aunt Phyllis," Lily cries. "It's not like we have any customers."

"They're coming. We get a half dozen or so in the late afternoon, as you would know if you didn't wander off every chance you got."

"But Patrick wants to go walking," the girl continues. "Don't you Pat?"

"Actually, I've still got a few chairs to move—"

"Please," Lily cuts in. "I can't stand being in here all day. If I were at camp this year, I'd be out at the lake right now, working on my backstroke."

"Pat is busy. He can't stop his day just because you feel like going for a walk."

"He's not so busy," Lily replies. "He took me to the beach last week, showed me the sea stars."

"After you begged him for an hour," Phyllis says. "Listen, why don't you

price those books and quiet down?”

“If she’s bothering you,” Patrick says, “I mean, if you need some quiet, I can take her into town, maybe for an hour or so.”

“See?” Lily says, “I told you he’s not doing anything.”

“Fine,” Phyllis replies. “If you finish pricing those books, I’ll let you go, but be back by seven. I’m making salmon tonight.”

“Can Patrick come to dinner?” Lily asks.

Patrick busies himself, dismantling the stack of chairs.

“Pat probably has a lot to do at the lab,” Phyllis says, walking to her desk. “He’s only got a few weeks now, before he leaves on his research cruise. Isn’t that right?”

Patrick looks up. “What was that?”

“Phyllis was just asking if you wanted to have dinner with us tonight,” Lily says.

“Both of you?” Patrick asks.

“That’s the idea,” Lily replies. “I’m stuck here all summer, remember?”

He turns to Phyllis, who is sorting through a pile of bills. “OK,” he says, “I’ll be there.”

The papers stop shuffling.

“Really?” Lily asks.

“Yeah, sure. I have my first night off in a while. I’ve heard your aunt’s not a bad chef.”

“I don’t know who you’ve been talking to,” Phyllis says, shaking her head. “But they sure haven’t tasted my cooking.”

“Don’t we have some books to price?” he asks, patting his pockets. “Someone find me a pen.”

Lily waves a pencil in the air. Within a half hour, the job is done and the two are bounding across the foyer’s worn Persian rug.

“Goodbye,” Phyllis calls from her desk, but the jangle of bells on the doorknob is her only reply.

* * *

Phyllis hung the *Help Wanted* sign in March, before she knew Lily was coming. Only then, after five years in the antique business, had she sold enough brass lamps and cloudy china to hire an assistant. When Patrick called about the job, he sounded like a boy. Phyllis was surprised to find him sturdy, almost strapping, at the interview. If he hadn’t been so short, he would have been handsome, with his squared shoulders and angular cheekbones. Of course, he was still a kid, she told herself, a decade younger than she. He said

he was a graduate student, working at the Oceanographic Institute in Woods Hole before setting off on a research cruise in September. She said she didn't care if he was setting off for the moon as long as he could lift the day's delivery into the shop. With expertise, he maneuvered the dresser inside. She asked him to stay for dinner.

"I wouldn't want to impose," he replied.

"Nonsense. I do it for all my new employees."

"All right. Who else is coming?"

"You're it, I'm afraid."

He looked up at her, shifting his weight between boots. "On second thought, I have a lot to catch up on at the lab tonight. Maybe some other time?"

"Sure," she said. "Some other time."

In the following months, he proved to be reliable, arriving punctually at the shop every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, as well as consistent, politely refusing her dinner invitations in favor of his research.

"They're slave drivers at that lab," she told him. "I have half the mind to go over there and complain."

"There's a lot of preparation to be done. We go out on the *Oceanus* at the end of the summer."

"How long are you gone for?"

"We dock in Florida next January."

"I don't imagine you'll be coming back here, then."

"I really can't say." He gazed out the window. "You want me to go outside and take a look at those porch boards?"

They were rarely alone in a room together for more than five minutes. He always found some stray nail, some cracked window in another part of the shop and set out to fix it. One morning, she brought a pair of coffee cups to where he knelt, varnishing an end table. They stood together sipping. Phyllis, who could see over the bushes, admired the marsh and the bay beyond while Patrick examined the brush. When the branches bored him, he turned to Phyllis. She was a slim woman with thick brown hair, cut above the shoulders. Most often, she dressed in bulky wool, but when she raised her arms, there was a patch of taught skin above the waistband of her jeans. Patrick wondered what she wore in the summer.

"Oh, you're looking at all my moth holes, aren't you?" She crossed her arms over her chest.

"No, I was only—"

"It's all right. At least let me explain myself. A few years ago there was an absolute explosion in the moth population. I don't know the exact reason for

it, but I'm sure there is one. Anyway, I tried to keep my screens and closets shut, but there was no hope for it. They feasted on my wool."

"You've got good taste."

"The moths think so."

He downed the last of his coffee. "I should get back to work."

"Wait, didn't I have something to tell you? Oh, that's right. I talked to my brother Daniel on the phone today. He lives in Providence with his family. His daughter just turned fifteen, at least I hope she did, or else that birthday card was all wrong." She laughed. "You know, it's still a little strange, my brother having a kid. When we were younger, Dan was a little overweight and I used to feel sorry for him, that he would never have a girlfriend." She laughed again, this time shaking her head. "Oh, God, I'm muttering on and you just want to finish your work so you can get out of here."

"No, I don't mind."

"The point is, my niece is coming to stay with me this summer, to help out around the shop. Of course, I'll still need you for the lifting and the deliveries, but you won't have to come in so often. Maybe one morning a week?"

He cracked his knuckles. "I don't mind still working the three days. I mean, I already have them off from the lab."

"That's very kind of you."

"To be honest, I could use the money."

"Right. Of course."

He returned his mug and moved the varnishing project to the lawn. The next time they met, she wore a cotton turtleneck.

* * *

Cicadas hum around the house. The dining room is mirrored in its own dark windows. Lily, who is setting the table, pauses to stare at her reflection. Phyllis closes the blinds.

"Shouldn't we have some candles?" Lily asks.

"I don't know that I have any," Phyllis replies, setting out two wine glasses.

When Phyllis goes back to the kitchen, Lily walks across the hall to the extra sitting room and returns with a tarnished candelabra.

"Where did you find that?" Phyllis asks.

"In your china cabinet."

"I didn't think I had—you took it from the shop didn't you? I told you not poke around in there. You might break something."

"Do you have any matches?"

“Why don’t you go and put that back?”

“Let’s light it. It’s not doing anyone any good in there.”

“I told you to put it back.”

“Wow,” Lily says. “Dad was right.”

“About what?”

“You.”

“Fine,” Phyllis says. “The matches are in the top kitchen drawer.”

As the girl trots away, Phyllis sees the table setting and stops. Lily has laid each fork on the left of the plate, and each knife and spoon on the right, below the water glass. At least that expensive boarding school has taught Dan’s child something—if not manners, then etiquette. Phyllis can’t help but envy the girl’s perfect posture.

There is a knock at the door.

“I’ll get it!” Lily rushes into the foyer. She has put on a peach colored, sleeveless dress with a full skirt. “Why, good evening, Patrick,” she says.

He looks down at his crumpled plaid button-up. “It seems I’m under-dressed.”

“It’s quite all right,” Phyllis calls. “It seems I am too. Lily forgot to mention this was a formal dinner party.”

They laugh as Lily closes the door and proceeds into the dining room to light the candles.

“If I had known this was going to be a classy event,” Patrick says, “I would have brought you ladies some flowers.”

Phyllis’ ears turn red. “Let’s have a seat before the food gets cold.”

They take their places, Patrick and Lily on the same side. When Phyllis reaches for the wine her niece says, “You forgot a glass.”

Phyllis laughs as she pours. “I’m afraid you’re not quite old enough, yet.”

“At home, Dad always let’s me have a sip.”

“Shall we have a toast?” Phyllis asks, sitting. She holds out her wine. “To our lovely summer together.”

“Yeah, right,” Lily says as the glasses clink.

“You’ll have to excuse my niece,” Phyllis says to Patrick. “This is the first summer in a few years she’s not at Miss Richard’s Camp for Girls. So far, the transition has been traumatizing.”

“Actually,” Lily cuts in, “I’m glad I didn’t go back. The girls there can be so immature.”

“Is that right?” Patrick asks, taking a forkful of fish.

“Yeah, all they want to talk about are the boys across the lake. Most nights I read in my bunk. I finished *Moby Dick* last summer.”

“The salmon is delicious,” Patrick says.

“Really?” Phyllis asks. “I thought it came out a little dry.”

“It’s perfect. I don’t know why I didn’t take you up on this before.”

Their eyes meet across the table.

Lily scrapes her knife and fork together loudly. “Pat pointed his ship out to me today.”

“That’s right,” he says. “I leave in about a month. Where June went is beyond me.”

“You aren’t nervous?” Phyllis asks.

“Not really. I spent a month on a research vessel off of Maine when I was an undergrad. I vomited for about a week, but after that it was smooth sailing, so to speak. That life sort of takes a hold on you. I can’t stand being landlocked now. So, yeah, it’ll be nice to finally get out there. Plus, we’ll be taking specimens from hydrothermal vents.”

“I don’t know how you get so excited about that stuff,” Lily says. “I mean, science is just so boring. There’s always one right answer.”

“Maybe in Chem 101 that’s true, but it gets more complicated,” Patrick replies. “That would be nice, though, wouldn’t it? One right answer for everything. One simple reason. Life would make a lot more sense.”

“That’s not so farfetched, I think,” Phyllis says. “If you look hard enough, you can find a logical explanation for anything.”

“Anything?” Lily asks. “Can you tell me why there are so many rocks on the beaches here?” She turns to Patrick. “It’s impossible to find a good place to sunbathe.”

“The shoreline is changing all the time, Lily,” Phyllis replies. “In a hundred years all those rocks will be sand. In the meantime we’ll have to find you a beach chair.”

Patrick chuckles.

Lily sits up straighter. “How about those keys that disappeared last week? Where did they go?”

“I found them under my desk yesterday.”

“OK, fine,” Lily says. “What about Clark?”

Phyllis looks into her wine glass. “Who?”

“That man you lived with in Boston. Why did he leave?”

Phyllis turns pink, from hairline to neck. “Lily, we have company.”

“It’s just Patrick. Why don’t you ever want to talk about this stuff?”

“What stuff?”

“You know, about you.”

“Well, it’s not as if you’ve shown any interest. You roll your eyes when I ask you what time it is.”

“That’s not true.”

Patrick clears his throat. “Phyl, I had no idea you lived in Boston. I’m from Southie originally. What a—”

“Who told you about Clark, Lily? Did your father talk to you about me?”

“Maybe,” Lily replies. “I probably shouldn’t say in front of the company.”

“He had no right,” Phyllis says. “That’s my private business.”

Patrick cuts in. “Where in Boston did you live?”

“He told me you moved out here to isolate yourself,” Lily says.

“Dan said that?” Phyllis asks.

“He said you like being pitiful,” the girl continues.

“That’s enough, Lily,” Patrick says.

“Go on,” Phyllis demands. “I want to hear this.”

“He sent me here because you’re lonely. Because he didn’t want you to—what did he say—rot away in your Shaker chairs, or something.”

A laugh rises from Phyllis’ throat. She lifts her wine glass, then sets it down again. “That’s Dan for you. He’ll criticize anything he doesn’t understand. You’re just trying to pick a fight, Lily. You don’t really care about my life.”

“No, I’m interested,” Lily replies.

“You don’t owe her an explanation, Phyl,” Patrick says.

“No, but I don’t want you having these ideas about me.”

“I don’t have any ideas. It doesn’t matter.”

“I want to set it straight,” Phyllis says. “After college I did move to Boston with a man. His name was Clark and we lived together ten years. He and my brother were buddies. Did your father tell you that, Lily?”

Lily shakes her head.

“He asked me to marry him. I said no. I gave him all kinds of reasons, but when I think about it now, none of them were as valid as the plain fact that I didn’t want to be married to him. We split up around the time Mom passed. What was it? Five years ago now. She left the house to me. Dan said he didn’t care. He already had your house in Providence. He said he would have sold this place anyway, but deep down, I think it bothered him.” Phyllis brings her glass to her lips and swallows a mouthful of wine. “I have my shop. I swim every morning.” She looks Lily in the eye. “I know you think that you can come into my house and start judging. Your father taught you that much. You might be good in school, but you’re fifteen. You don’t know everything. Not even close.”

“I never said I did.”

“And contrary to what your father might tell you,” Phyllis continues,

“you don’t need a man every second of every day. There’s plenty more to life.”

Patrick slides his chair back. “I think that’s my cue.” He stands. “I have to be in the lab early tomorrow.”

Lily throws her napkin onto the table. “I’m coming with you.”

“No, you’re not,” Phyllis says.

The girl gets up and slips on her sandals.

“You’d better stay here,” Patrick says, then turns back to the table. “Thanks for dinner.” He steps into the dark.

Lily stays for a moment, staring at her aunt. Phyllis looks at the window, but the shades are drawn. The screen door slams. When Phyllis turns, the room is empty.

* * *

The grass is still wet when Lily comes up the walk the next morning. On the porch, Phyllis raises her head from her hands.

“Are you all right? Did anything happen?”

Lily climbs the steps and slips inside without a word. Phyllis stands and crosses the lawn, heading the way Lily came. When Patrick answers the door, his hair is on end.

“Phyllis. Hi. Is everything OK?”

“To think I trusted you with her.”

A man in the living room looks up from his paper.

“Come on,” Patrick says. “Let’s go upstairs.” His room is strewn with socks and papers. He laughs too loudly as he dashes to collect several pairs of boxer shorts from the floor.

Phyllis looks at the bed. It is narrow and unmade. “To think I trusted you with her.”

“You’re repeating yourself, and I haven’t the slightest clue what you’re talking about.”

“What happened here last night?”

“She called you, right? I told her she had to call you.”

“Yes, she called me, Patrick, but that’s beside the point. What happened?”

“Nothing.”

“Tell me.”

“She followed me. I told her to go home. She wouldn’t. So, I let her sleep on the sofa downstairs. That’s it. No big deal. You have to let kids run away sometimes. God, when I was a teenager, I can’t tell you how often—“

"I'm asking you to be truthful with me."

"That's it, I swear. Jesus, Phyllis. What do think of me?"

"She's a bright girl."

"She is."

"She's very pretty."

He throws a bundle of laundry in to the closet.

"Isn't she Patrick? Don't you think she's pretty?"

"Sure."

"It's easy, isn't it, to forget how old she is?"

"Come on, Phyl, you know me. I shouldn't have to prove myself to you."

"Why have you been giving her so much attention?"

"I was being nice. Would you rather she sat around your house moping?"

"Don't you think it's a little weird? I'm asking you to look at it from my perspective, now. A twenty—what—twenty-two?"

"Twenty-three."

"A twenty-three-year-old guy running around with a fifteen-year-old?"

"I thought I was helping you out. Lily isn't easily entertained. I was getting her out of your hair."

"It is *my* responsibility to look after my brother's child." She puts her hands over her face. "Damn. It's my own fault. Why didn't I pay closer attention?"

He sits on the bed. "Listen, maybe I shouldn't have let her stay here. It should have been your call. Honestly, I didn't pull anything. I thought I was doing you a favor."

She wipes her face on her shirt.

"Hey Phyllis," he continues. "You know all those times, all those times I said I was busy at the lab and couldn't stay for dinner? Well, I was nervous. When it was just you and me, I couldn't think of anything to say."

She lowers herself onto a desk chair. "You had better things to do."

"Lay off the old maid bit. You're the only one who sees yourself that way."

"Yeah, and Lily."

"Are you kidding? That girl looks up to you. And here you've got her convinced you don't like her."

"What? She told you that?"

"Maybe you could be a little more patient with her."

"Don't tell me how to treat my own niece. You heard the way she talked to me last night."

"I'm just trying to help."

“You’ve done enough. We’ll all be better off once you’re gone.”

“You don’t mean that.”

“She likes you, Patrick. Don’t you think it’s going to be hard for her, when you leave? When you go off to sea and she never sees you again?”

He looks down at his feet.

“Maybe it would be better,” Phyllis continues, “if you stop work at the shop early.”

“That’s not fair.”

“You should have thought of that before going after a fifteen-year-old.”

“For Christ’s sake, Phyllis.”

“What?” she demands. “What? You’re going to try to tell me it’s nothing? You were just trying to help out? I don’t think so. Why did you come into *my* shop so often this past month, and talk to *my* niece, and act like I wasn’t even there? Like I was just another lamp in the room? Don’t you think I deserve an explanation?”

He stands and approaches her chair.

“You’re just a kid, Patrick. You’re nothing but a—“

His mouth tastes salty, and his scruff scratches like tiny grains of sand.

When she gets home, the skin around her lips is red. “I must have brushed against some poison ivy and then touched my face,” she tells her niece, but the rash fades without a drop of calamine.

* * *

Lily reclines on the wicker sofa. The fan clicks and geese honk down by the pond. She swats a fly with her book.

“Lily!” Phyllis calls. “Get out here and find me some bubble wrap.”

The girl pulls herself up and goes into the main room. The air feels moist and heavy. “Here,” she says, handing the packing materials to her aunt.

“Nice of you to deign to speak to me again,” Phyllis replies. “I could have used your help today. Patrick didn’t come in.”

“Did he tell you, why he did it?”

Phyllis busies herself wrapping a table lamp. “Something came up at the lab, I’m sure.”

“Oh, Phyllis, you don’t know.”

“Don’t know what?”

“He’s gone. He left.”

“What are you talking about?”

“When he didn’t come in this morning, I went over to his house, looking for him. I thought we could go for a walk, you know, play hooky together.

But he wasn't there. His roommate said he left. He left already on a different boat, an earlier boat."

"That's impossible."

"That's what I thought, but I went up to his room and it was empty. Why would he do that, Aunt Phyllis? Why would he just leave like that, without even stopping by? It doesn't make any sense."

Phyllis sits frozen, the half wrapped package in her hands.

"Why, Aunt Phyllis?" Lily's voice shakes. "It just doesn't make any sense."

"You know young guys," Phyllis replies, coolly. "He has a lot on his mind, a lot of people to say goodbye to. It doesn't mean he didn't think of you."

"Yeah, but I'm not just people. I mean, Pat and I, we were, we were—"

"You were what?"

"I don't know."

"Patrick never made you feel uncomfortable did he?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Did he ever get too close? Or say anything, I don't know, weird?"

"He said lots of weird things. He's funny."

"When you were at his house on Saturday night, did he try to kiss you?"

"Phyllis!"

"What? I'm just wondering. You said you were, *I don't know*, and trailed off. What do you expect me to think?"

"He was a gentleman."

"So he didn't kiss you."

"I don't see how that's any of your business."

"Lily, if anything happened, if you were hurt in some way, I'm responsible. I have to make sure you're OK. Now, are you going to tell me or aren't you?"

"Why does it matter now? He's gone, isn't he?"

"For the last time, yes or no?"

Lily moves toward the window, turning her back to Phyllis. "No."

"He didn't even try? Don't be afraid to tell me. I won't be mad. I won't tell your father."

"No, OK? No. Is that what you want to hear?"

"I want to hear the truth."

"No. No. No. Are you happy? He didn't even try." Tears slide down her face. "He didn't even want to. He didn't even try."

"Shh." Phyllis puts her arms around Lily from behind. "Oh, honey, I know, but it's easier this way isn't it? Now there's nothing to explain to your

ZACHARY BOS

on not having psychic powers

With overburdened chakras aching and a heart full of hope, as hard as I know how, my will is willing you to walk in (*right now*). But, the door stays unopened. Shall I therefore bow defeated to Skepticism, that grouchy police agent of reason who scrutinizes my sentiment for any sign of such romantic feelings as are tantamount to treason?

No. I persevere. Practice karmic balance and blow out candles in my ear. Someday my latent powers will grow so manifestly great that when I want to visit you I shall simply levitate. If I have to swim across a sea of snake oil, I will swim it. If I come across a factless chasm then I will jump right into it to find you at the bottom.

However: I hesitate to project astrally across the plane. It's hard to hold a spirit body. Plus, the hands are cold.

NORA DELANEY

divination

Like a dowser, my methods are unsure
and shaky. The hand is caught in tremor;
the rod of witch-hazel dips and twitches.
I have become a water-witch, my wand
of willow slipping from my grasp. Like you:
the luck I thought would outlast all omens—
the pitiful pitch of the yarrow stalks,
the spirit-board, the spread of tarot cards.
We are not immune to divination.
Although we seek to defy augury
like the prince of Denmark, we see little.
We are not visionary creatures, you
and I. Our garters tangled, our stars crossed,
our runes long cast, not knowing what we've lost.

an interview with janaka stucky

Janaka Stucky is practicing the perfection of effort while working on silent relationships with whiskey, pugilism and the history of tentacles. He is also the publisher of the independent press, Black Ocean, and its literary magazine, *Handsome*. Some of his poems have appeared in *Cannibal*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Fence*, *Free Verse*, *No Tell Motel*, *North American Review*, *redivider* and *VOLT*. His chapbook, *Your Name Is The Only Freedom*, is available from Brave Men Press.

In April 2010, readers of the *Boston Phoenix* named Stucky Best Poet in their annual Best of Boston poll. He was a write-in candidate, sweeping a category full of local heavies: Sam Cornish, Robert Pinsky, Louise Gluck, Rosanna Warren, Margo Lockwood and Frank Bidart.

Q: Your proximity to death as a part time undertaker and your ability to interact with it both physically and in writing may appear morbid or macabre to some. How do you feel that death connects to your poetry?

First, I should take this opportunity to clarify that I am no longer a “part-time undertaker,” as the *Boston Phoenix* recently reported. I did work in the funeral business for seven years, and towards the end I went down to part time, but I stopped that line of work over a year ago. Nonetheless, working in the trade influenced and informed my work a great deal—especially because I started as an apprentice at the same time I started my work on an MFA in poetry. At first the influence was merely in the realm of subject matter; I was processing a lot, burying up to three bodies a day at the city’s largest funeral home, and that process came out in my writing and in my dreams. For the first couple of years I was losing my grip on the “known,” while trying to embrace the “unknown.” However, once I moved past the physicality, the constant contemplation of death began to influence my aesthetic as a whole, and freed me from my fear. My poems opened up, celebrating the ephemeral nature of their own language in a way I had never experienced before.

I came to understand the poem as a ritual, a funeral for the constant death of language. This should only seem macabre and morbid if you’re hung up on “death” as a negative term. Death is inevitable and if you can accept that, soon you learn to embrace it, and then you learn to celebrate it. I mean this in all things, not just the body.



Janaka Stucky (photo courtesy Adrienne Mathiowetz)

Q: That being said, do you find that people expect a certain element of death in everything you do, and that your roles as an undertaker and in burlesque have made you a character rather than a writer?

I worried about this for a while, and I think for a while that was a legitimate concern because almost every poem I was writing was a death poem. But I wrote poems for years before I started that work, and continue to write now that I've stopped. Many of my significant achievements in poetry have either come in recent years, since I stopped writing overtly about death, or—like founding Black Ocean—have nothing to do with that work. I find that many of my colleagues are only vaguely aware of that “other life” as an undertaker / burlesque performer / horror aficionado. Likewise, my colleagues in the performance scene and in the funeral business were only vaguely aware of my involvement in poetry. For a while I was living three or four different lives. This year, that's started to come together more; I think I'm down to two...

Q: Who do you consider your audience? In our screen era, as people are buying fewer books, how will poetry be consumed?

This is a great question, and one I think any artists need to ask again and again because the answer changes over time. It should change, or else your work isn't changing and that's a problem. Sometimes my audience is just one person and sometimes that person is imaginary. When I was younger, my audience was future generations of undergraduate students, unpacking in their classrooms the brilliant and complex allusions I thought my work contained. I once wrote a poem about android hipsters uncovering my words in an archaeological dig... For a long time my audience was my ex-wife, because she rarely read poetry and she was very important to me. Right now I think I mostly write poems for myself. If I can surprise myself in my own poem then I take that as a good sign.

As for the “screen age” and poetry, and the decline in books—it doesn't bother me that much. Poetry existed before books, and it will continue to exist after them. The art itself will evolve as we evolve and some things will fall away and new elements will emerge to keep it relevant to our lives. I can't predict what poems will look like in the future but we will always need to express ourselves in a language free from the rules of prose. Maybe if we stop singing then poetry would also disappear. But I can't imagine that moment coming for quite some time—our understanding of physics might be different then and our bodies might be reduced to light.

Q: You have been very successful in the past with spoken word poetry. How do you find the process of writing poetry to be spoken and poetry to be read different?

I wouldn't say "very successful," but for your readers maybe we should supply context. I co-founded a street poetry collective in the late 90s called the Guerilla Poets. It started in Boston with 17 members and grew to 700 people nationwide. Eventually we had an anthology published, which I edited. Nonetheless, I don't feel that I personally enjoyed much success in the world of "spoken word," or "slam poetry." I was never a superstar there—which actually gets back to your question. I do think that writing a slam poem is different than writing a poem for the page. Slam has rules and specific audiences and judges—it's almost a form unto itself. The Guerilla Poets were interested in taking poems written for the page and finding ways to present them with intensity, even if that intensity is quiet. Poetry has an aural quality and we were celebrating that. When I write and revise poems I often read them out loud to myself, to better hear the poem. In that sense I think every poem should be spoken, though sometimes some poems lose nuances off the page that they contained on it. Certain types of puns, for example, and reflexive allusions; I love the way enjambment can be used to create double meanings. One can do one's best to affect line breaks and white space in breath, but usually something is lost. Ideally we could read along with the poet to have the fullest experience.

Q: Black Ocean combines print, concerts, exhibitions, as well as other events. What do you think is the benefit of mixing these media?

I can't say there is a definitive benefit to the poetry by producing live events—or vice versa. I just love putting on shows. Usually the audiences are different for the events and the books, though there is some overlap. My hope would be that by having really cool events under the same umbrella as the books, people could move past the stigma poetry suffers under. It kind of blows my mind how ill-read many artists I know are when it comes to poetry. Perhaps they were exposed to the handful of stale writers shoved down their throats in school and gave up on the art altogether. Imagine if someone judged the entirety of music based on the 20-30 songs their teachers played for them when they were teenagers... To me poetry can be as radical and experimental as any other art. I don't think the problem is that it's too inaccessible; I have no populist illusions about poetry. Rather than trying to commercialize it, I want to connect it with its audience—which is not a mainstream audience. There are a lot of people out there that want to be challenged and stimulated and would find the books we publish exciting, but don't consider

themselves “readers of poetry.” So my hope is to subtly connect some of those people with our books by producing events that are exciting, stimulating and sometimes challenging. But even if that connection doesn’t happen everyone has still has a good time. There are so many ways to be happy. A good poem creates a space where anything can happen, and discovering that possibility creates a fissure of uncertainty that cracks open the rest of our lives until finally we can become greater than the simple definitions around us. I like to produce events that do that too—that create what Hakim Bey called a “Temporary Autonomous Zone.” Autonomy—freedom from the known—is essentially radical. It takes that kind of autonomy to live a deliberately beautiful life.

Q: What are you working on now?

I’ve been boxing for about two years now and I’m getting interested in pursuing other physical disciplines as well. Maybe fencing is next, or jujitsu—though I really enjoy boxing. It’s amazing how physical activity clears the mind, and how quickly we forget that. It can be a meditation if you really push past your comfort zone. In that sense, it primes me for writing poems that come from a deeper, more freely associative layer of my brain. I’m really interested in poetry that comes from altered states of consciousness, and I’m constantly pushing myself to do that without the aid of foreign chemicals. Psychedelics have a real place in the creative process but I find it personally impossible to write anything of skill during a trip. I’m training my mind to work in that encrypted archetypal mode, while concurrently operating on a fairly lucid plane alongside it. That’s a dark place to operate in, but I don’t mean that in the Christian sense. There is a lot of light there too, just the imperceptible kind that vibrates within us. My latest poems are filled with non-ironic monsters, or angels, depending on your point of view.

Q: What advice would you give to young writers?

I’m a young writer myself so I don’t think I’m in much of a position to be giving advice. I can share my experience in the second person though... You should always question what you’re doing. If you think that you’ve entirely succeeded then you should either quit or admit that you’re wrong. Spend a lot of time with your mind and enjoy being there. Sometimes the struggle to communicate is so great it can call you, so when you’re not struggling remember to have fun. Lastly I suppose I would say do whatever you can to promote the art, especially when it’s being produced in quality by other people. If you love writing, like any love, you should be able to forget yourself in it and be joyful in the knowledge that it simply exists.

an interview with ben mazer

Ben Mazer is a graduate of the Editorial Institute here at Boston University, where his advisors were Christopher Ricks and Archie Burnett. His most recent collections of poems are *Poems* (The Pen & Anvil Press) and *January 2008* (Dark Sky Books), both published in April 2010.

Pulitzer Prize-winning poet John Ashbery has said of Mazer's work: "Like fragments of old photographs happened on in a drawer, [his] poems tap enigmatic bits of the past that suddenly come to life again. To read him is to follow him along a dreamlike corridor where everything is beautiful and nothing is as it seems."

Q: You've published several collections of your own poetry; you've also edited volumes by such poets as Landis Everson and John Crowe Ransom. What challenges have you found in balancing your work as a writer with your editorial work, and what insights have you gained as a result?

Yes, I've edited the poetry of Landis Everson, John Crowe Ransom, and now Frederick Goddard Tuckerman (*Selected Poems of Frederick Goddard Tuckerman*, Harvard University Press, 2010), as well as several feature-length anthologies for *Fulcrum*, all while working continuously on my own poetry. I can only say that this kind of work refines and bolsters one's sense of the delicacies of the literary medium. One gravitates more confidently toward precision in one's thought and expression. It's far from stultifying to become intimate with the working textual or revisionary processes of a gifted poet through a careful and studious collation of manuscript and print sources.

Q: Your early poems are marked by a lyrical sense of rhythm, slant rhymes, and vivid landscapes. Do you feel your poetic style has changed over the years, and in what ways?

It's just become more supple and given to incorporating wider ranges and stretches of feeling and observation. All the musical elements that were there to begin with are still at play, though perhaps the music has become richer, the contrapuntals, elided and chopped up puns and internal rhymes more devious. It is a quite unconscious thing. I am usually not intending either rhyme or meter or reference; they come very naturally.



Ben Mazer (photo courtesy Vanessa Barnard)

Q: What drew you to the work of the Berkeley poets and Landis Everson in particular? When you wrote on the Berkeley Renaissance for *Fulcrum*, did you foresee taking on the task of editing *Everything Preserved*?

I fell in with Landis accidentally due to some impinging curiosity about the nature of poetry in the San Francisco bay area prior to the arrival of the Beats. While editing the Berkeley anthology—a map of what my curiosity led me to—Landis began writing poems again after a silence of 43 years. From that moment I saw *Everything Preserved* lying ahead in the future in a flash. The progression toward it seemed inevitable. There is a whole nother book too that Landis wrote after that—*Book of Valentines*—which hasn't found a publisher yet. I think it's his masterpiece.

Q: What interests you about the personalities you deal with in your poems, such as the criminal on the run in “A Traveller” and the jack-of-all-trades in “A Visitor?”

The poems I write generally spring from quite unconscious sources, so that I can't very well say what the interest is (although I am personally attracted to the sounds and rhythms). A friend has suggested, in the case of

those early poems, that the subject or protagonist actually represents some dimension of myself, possibly of my anxieties and a working out of their potential spiritual meaning. But the figure in “A Visitor” is also my uncle the architect and aesthetic philosopher—a man who lives almost invisibly among us and yet leaves his permanent mark of influence on our lives and surroundings after he is gone. In “A Traveller” I believe I was thinking of or experiencing the desire to escape from a worldly identity toward a truer, more personal and also more impersonal, spiritual identity, itself marked by the influence of past allegiances and conflict.

Q: What new projects do you have in the works?

I wish to do a great deal of reading in theology, philosophy and history, and to reread a lot of favorite poetry. I’ll bide my time until new poems occur. I suppose I’ll look for a job or for some attractive means of avoiding working for others altogether, but that partly depends on what I conclude from my reading, and whatever other unexpected opportunities lie in my future.

Q: Who do you feel are your greatest influences?

My entire life is the influence for my poetry; and something more than that, something that I would call innate within (which when applied to experience might, for example, recognize the eternal dimensions in concrete and particular microcosms of the universal story, a man with a white beard at the base of a mountain on a wood floor covered in sawdust, say, or see). Something which I wanted to find a means to express, and in which I expected to discover my relationship to the world. Additionally, in particular, there have been my friendships with such intelligences as Christopher Ricks, who was my advisor at the Editorial Institute, and the poets Philip Nikolayev and Stephen Sturgeon, who edit *Fulcrum: An Annual of Poetry and Aesthetics*, to which I have contributed poetry and prose. As a young poet I was especially influenced by Yeats, Auden, T.S. Eliot, Hart Crane, Robert Lowell, Wallace Stevens, Dylan Thomas, William Empson, R.P. Blackmur, Robert Graves, Blake, Shelley, Donne, and Shakespeare—the usual suspects.

I was also influenced by being surrounded by my grandparents during childhood, by an uncle who taught me something of classical music and art, and aesthetics, and by reading Lewis Carroll and Poe quite early on. My father was a psychoanalyst, and my mother was an actress on the stage; my entire extended family was extremely nurturing and kind. This is a cursory overview and doesn’t touch upon the thousands of silver and golden age motion pictures (many of them silents and early talkies) I have contemplated since the age of about six. In grasping the world, the image is very strong. It is the trans-

lation of imagery, and its ideational correlatives, into sound which is the particular problem or experience of the poet. Landis Everson was undoubtedly an influence in that he made anything seem possible. I think he was the best poet of his generation, though he didn't fulfill his promise until the end of his life. Up until then, his inner resources were just brooding and brewing.

Q: As a new writer, what did you do to help establish yourself?

To establish myself in some small degree I enlisted the encouragement of elders such as Seamus Heaney and Robert Lowell's friend William Alfred, and then built upon that as a means of obtaining the confidence of a courageous individual named Barbara Matteau who undertook to publish my first book of poems, *White Cities* (Cambridge, MA: Barbara Matteau Editions, 1995). This book included a cover and title-page illustration by Robert Lowell's friend Frank Parker, of which I was enormously proud. Though Seamus was a pernicious influence in and out of his advanced poetry writing seminar at Harvard; I didn't want to write like that, and felt like I had something better up my sleeve. The times seemed against me. Philip Nikolayev and I gave readings and attracted our own audience among the student population; they wrote passionate and billowy articles about us in the *Advocate*, calling us the Cambridge Wits. We were elected as honorary members to the Signet Society, but the house lady there was I think a bit horrified and we were never given a key to the outfit.

Q: Do you have any advice for new writers ?

My advice to those who feel they have a serious need to communicate something of importance in poetry is simply to read a great deal, very widely, and if possible thoroughly, in order to become intimate with the nature of the language and the range of what has already been done. Wide and thorough reading in different historical periods of literature, and at different levels, from the popular to the esoteric, has the capacity to illuminate the overall essential exigencies of the language situation as well as the human one. To those who have nothing really serious to say, give it up before you harm yourself with notions. It is a life of great spiritual and personal hardship, not very desirable except to the compulsively obsessive. You can ruin your life in this wild goose chase! But some people can't be tempted away from it. We should pray for them, but it is their own folly.

about the authors

Jasmine V. Bailey is the Olive B. O'Connor creative writing fellow at Colgate University. She holds an MFA from the University of Virginia and her chapbook, *Sleep and What Precedes It*, is available from Longleaf Press.

Franz Baskett is a graduate of the Creative writing program at the University of Arkansas. His fiction has appeared in *First Intensity*, *Gypsy Blood Review*, *The Istanbul Review*. He is the 1996 Grand Prize Winner of the Negative Capability Fiction Contest. He lives in Fayetteville, Arkansas, where he leads a very quiet life indeed.

Zachary Bos is completing an MFA in Poetry at Boston University. He is a founding member of the Boston Poetry Union, and of the Union's literary imprint, The Pen & Anvil Press.

Janet Butler developed her passions for both watercolors and poetry while living in central Italy, where she spent more than 20 years. She relocated to the Bay Area in 2005, and currently lives in Victorian Alameda with Fulmi, a beautiful Spaniel mix she rescued in Italy and brought back with her. Some recent publications include *The Chaffey Review*, *13th Warrior*, *Plain-songs*, *Locust* and *Cutthroat*. Work will soon be appearing in *Flutter, from east to west*, and *Wild Violet*. A chapbook, *To see you no more*, is forthcoming from Punkin House Press; another, *Under Italian Skies*, will be published by Flutter Press in the summer of 2010.

Sean Campbell was born in Carmel, New York. He is now attending Emerson College for graduate studies in fiction. This is his second poem published by *Clarion*; another will soon appear in *Boston Review*.

Jenna Dee studies English and architecture at Boston University. She is impresario of the *Back Bay Review*, an online magazine of culture & criticism.

Nora Delaney is a Boston-based writing instructor, translator, and writer. She is a founding member of The Pen & Anvil Press and edits *The Charles River Journal* and *Sixty-Six: The Journal of Sonnet Studies*. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Fulcrum*, *Absinthe: New European Writing*, *Jacket*, and other publications.

Joseph Dorazio lives in the suburbs of Philadelphia. His poetry has appeared in various print and online poetry journals, including *The Mad Poets Review*, *Schuylkill Valley Journal*, *Philadelphia Poets*, *Chest*, and *Nerve Cowboy*.

William Doreski teaches at Keene State College in New Hampshire. His most recent collection of poetry is *Waiting for the Angel* (2009). He has published three critical studies, including *Robert Lowell's Shifting Colors*. His

essays, poetry, and reviews have appeared in journals including *Massachusetts Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *The Alembic*, *New England Quarterly*, *Harvard Review*, *Modern Philology*, *Antioch Review*, and *Natural Bridge*.

Rebecca Fofonoff is completing her senior year at Boston University, where she is majoring in French Language and Literature.

Marie Gauthier was the recipient of a 2008 Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Prize. Her first chapbook, *Hunger All Inside*, was released by Finishing Line Press. She lives with her husband and two young sons in Shelburne Falls, MA, where she works for a small press and serves on the board for the Collected Poets Series.

Joseph Goosey parks cars in Jacksonville, Florida but he will soon move to DC. His work has appeared in *PANK*, *Is Reads*, *Exquisite Corpse*. He is currently trying to pimp out a novel, and thanks you for reading.

Jenny Lawton Grassl writes poetry and makes digital collages with poems. Her interest in automatic writing has led her to paint such writing onto canvases. She has exhibited most recently in Surprise the Tender Alphabet at Nave Art Gallery in Somerville, MA. Publications where her poems have appeared include *Critiphoria*, *LIT*, *Bennington Review*, *Pierogi*, *Euphony*, and *Sacred Fire*. Find her online at www.jennylawtongrassl.com.

KJ Hays lives in CA, with his dog, Mr. Bear. Some more of his poetry can be found on *Prick of the Spindle*, *The Very Serious Mustache'd Magazine*, and *Shampoo*. He would love it if you said some nice things about his work: khays45@gmail.com.

Graham Hillard lives in Nashville, Tennessee, where he teaches English and Creative Writing at Trevecca Nazarene University. His poems, stories, and essays have appeared widely, in such journals as *Tar River Poetry*, *Puerto del Sol*, *New York Quarterly*, and *The Oxford American*.

Daniel Hudon, originally from Canada, now lives in Boston and teaches natural science to humanities students at Boston University. His writing has appeared in print and online publications including *Cezanne's Carrot*, *Neon*, *Bayou Magazine*, *Descant*, *The New Quarterly*, *Grain*, *The Antigonish Review*, *The Nashwaak Review* and *Querty*.

Erik T. Johnson is a writer from New York whose work has appeared in *New York Stories*, *The Absinthe Literary Review*, *Trunk Stories*, *Sein und Werden*, and other publications. You can keep updated on his work by visiting www.eriktjohnson.net.

Alan King is a writer from the D.C. metropolitan area. He blogs at www.alanwking.wordpress.com.

Irene Koronas is the poetry editor for *Wilderness House Literary Review*. Her poetry has appeared in *LummoX*, *Free Verse*, *Posey*, and many on-line 'zines.

She has published two books *Self Portrait Drawn From Many* (Ibbettson Street Press, 2007) and *Pentakomo Cyprus* (Cervana Barva Press, 2009). Her most recent chapbook is *Emily Dickinson* (Propaganda Press, 2010).

Samuel Lovett is a student of American History and African Diaspora studies at Boston College. Originally from East Providence, Rhode Island, he lives in Chestnut Hill where he works on the staff of *Post Road*. His work has appeared in *Stylus* and *Naked Singularity*.

Sergio Ortiz is a poet, and photographer. He was recently published, or is forthcoming in *The Battered Suitcase*; *Poor Mojo's Almanac(k)*; *WTF PWM*; *13th Warrior*; *Dark Lady Poetry*; and *Writers' Bloc*. Photographs will appear in *The Neglected Ratio* and *The Monongahela Review*. Ronin Press published his second chapbook, *Topography of a Desire*, in May of 2010.

Peter Schwartz's poetry has been published in *The Columbia Review*, *Diagram*, and *Opium Magazine*. His latest chapbook, *Old Men, Girls, and Monsters*, is slowly making its way towards you.

Sharron Singleton, before turning to poetry, was a social worker with low-income families and the mentally ill, and a community organizer around issues of civil rights and the anti-nuclear war movement. Her poems have appeared in *Agni*, *Rattle*, *The Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Many Mountains Moving* and *Atlanta Review*, among others. A chapbook, *A Thin Thread of Water*, will be published in October 2010 by Finishing Line Press. She teaches poetry in a small rural Virginia town. She is married with two children and five grandchildren, and is a passionate gardener.

Adam Tavel's poems have appeared in *South Carolina Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Apalachee Review*, *Night Train*, and *The Summerset Review*. He has new work forthcoming in *Georgetown Review*, *Portland Review*, and *Cave Wall*. He lives and teaches on Maryland's eastern shore.

J. A. Tyler is the author of six novel(la)s including *Inconceivable Wilson* (Scrambler Books, 2009) and the forthcoming *A Man of Glass & All The Ways We Have Failed* (Fugue State Press, 2011). His work has appeared in *Sleepingfish*, *Caketrain*, *Inch*, and *elimae*, among others. He is also founding editor of Mud Luscious Press, www.mudlusciouspress.com.



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Daniel E. Pritchard, Managing Editor
Letter from the Editor: Volume 1, Issue 1

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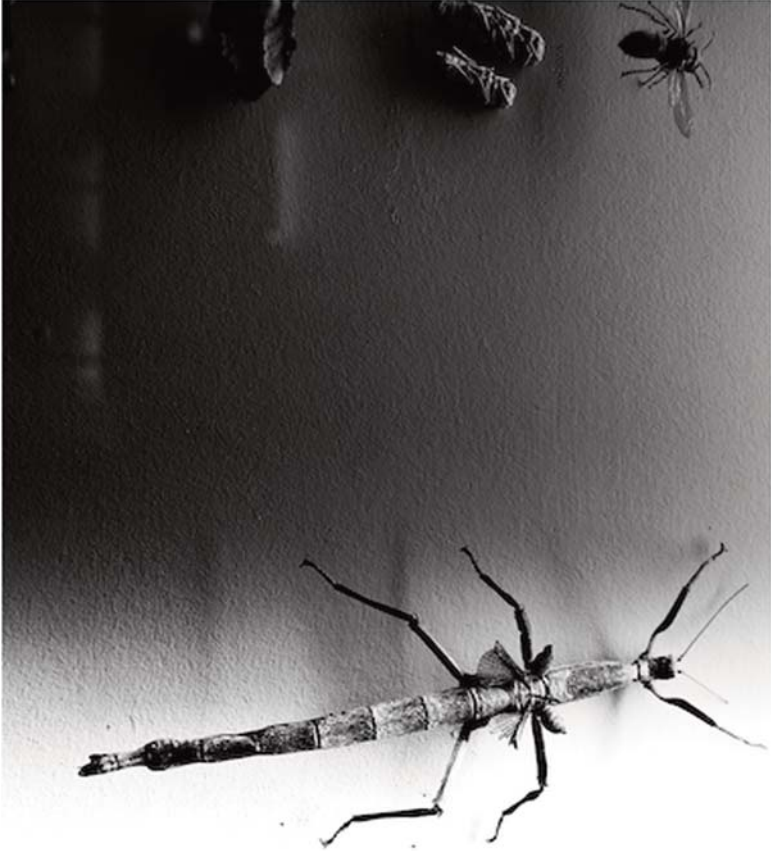
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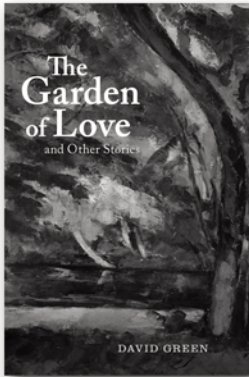
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