

#7

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# FUGUE

**Pattiann Rogers**  
**Stephen Dobyns**

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Jennifer Deckert

Barbara J. Petoskey

Steve Rasnic Tem

Mike Lubow

Charles A. Payne

Elsie Watson

McFarland

Maria Theresa Maggi

Deborah Cuthbert

Paul Lindholdt

Neil C. Fitzgerald

**The University Of Idaho Literary Digest**

**FUGUE, #7, Spring/Summer 1993**  
The University of Idaho Literary Digest

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## SHORT STORIES

|                  |    |
|------------------|----|
| TA O             |    |
| Jennifer Deckert | 13 |
| INCURSION        |    |
| Mike Lubow       | 28 |
| PROPER GRIEF     |    |
| Deborah Cuthbert | 39 |

## FEATURED WRITER

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| Stephen Dobyns |   |
| DECEPTIONS     | 7 |

## FEATURED POET

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| Pattiann Rogers      | 3 |
| THE WOODLAND SNAIL   |   |
| AT TWILIGHT          | 4 |
| OLD, OUTMODDED POEMS | 6 |

## POETRY

|                        |    |
|------------------------|----|
| WASHING THE CAR IN     |    |
| LATE OCTOBER           |    |
| Barbara J. Petoskey    | 26 |
| LIPS                   |    |
| Steve Rasnic Tem       | 27 |
| MY IMMORTAL ATOMS      |    |
| Charles A. Payne       | 34 |
| PHOEBE HAD POLIO       |    |
| Elsie Watson McFarland | 35 |
| SHIPWRECK              |    |
| Maria Theresa Maggi    | 36 |
| VOYEURS                |    |
| Elsie Watson McFarland | 38 |
| FISHING                |    |
| Paul Lindholdt         | 43 |
| DRIVEN                 |    |
| Neil C. Fitzgerald     | 44 |

## DEPARTMENTS

|            |    |
|------------|----|
| GRAFFITI   | 2  |
| GUIDELINES | 46 |

## GRAFFITI

Editorial  
Comments  
Etc.

It's now that I realize how much work and difficulty is involved in keeping a small literary magazine alive. I have been involved since the inception of this one — was one of its founding staff — and it's only as I prepare to move on to graduate study that I realize, in some utterly disjointed fashion...

I've had it easy...

Being an editor, that is.

There are so many people out in the world trying to become writers. I've met quite a few just within the literary and academic universe, not to mention the vast number I'm in contact with in my commercial editing endeavors. How could we *all* possibly find some place to get into print? Are we all bloody insane, or what? Yes, I think so, just a little. It's a twisted business, and like any sane creature who willingly walks into the madhouse and locks itself in, we all go a little wacko. The insanity is contagious. It's a prerequisite for the profession.

Who would possibly put up with continuously having some editor judge their work, some unknown and unmet *it*,

who will determine if the work in question is acceptable for human consumption? Who would put up with the constant waiting, hanging upon the mailbox waiting for a response from that editor, eyeing the mailman like a half-starved vulture watches an alley cat too dangerous to face head on, patiently watching for it to tip over and gag out its last breath? (Then raid the carcass for a little sustenance — perhaps that postman has been holding back your acceptance letter.) And why would anyone put up with being paid so little for their work that the compensation barely covers the postal costs of sending out the next manuscript? Who would put up with the constant jibes and nagging queries —

"Why don't you get a *real* job?"

"No, really, what *do* you do?"

"Why do you want to do *that*?"

"So, what do you want to be when you grow up?"

"Yeah, I had this idea for a book once."

"That's nice — everyone should try to live out their fantasy."

"Oh please, Stephen King you are *not!*"

So, who is it that would put up with all of this?

Only a writer — people like me, people like those found in these pages. Are we stupid, or what? Maybe... in someone else's eyes who doesn't really know what it is all about. It is a drive, a need, the

["Graffiti" continued on page 45]

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**FEATURED POET**

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# PATTIANN ROGERS

Introduction by  
Ron McFarland

Distinguished Visiting Writer in poetry for the Spring 1993 semester at the University of Idaho was Pattiann Rogers, who is currently teaching at the University of Arkansas.

A Missouri native and longtime resident of Houston, Texas, where she received a master's degree in creative writing from the University of Houston, Ms. Rogers now resides south of Denver when she is not teaching. This summer she will be involved in three writing workshops ranging from Sitka, Alaska to Squaw Valley, California. Her fifth collection of poems, *Geocentric*, was recently published by Peregrine-Smith. Ms. Rogers read from her poems before an enthusiastic audience the evening of April 21st at the UI Law School Courtroom.

["The Woodland Snail at Twilight" first appeared in *Fine Madness* and is reprinted here with the permission of the author.]

Pattiann Rogers

## THE WOODLAND SNAIL AT TWILIGHT

The snail, *Helix hortensis*, being multi-dimensional, touches, in any moment, many more things than one. The mucous tongue of her single foot, as sensitive as a bloom of honeysuckle, licks, probes each bump and fissure of the fallen hickory twig. And while the polish of her stone back, between clouds and shadows, assumes the light of the dawning Alpha Centauri, the crude eye of her tentacle tip seeks and becomes one with the emerging blue point of Jupiter.

Sister to the temperate forest floor, she touches also, by kinship, the snail that touches the snail that sleeps in ice above the snowline of the Himalayas, and she is bound by blood to the conical, creamy white snail that pulls over the desert dust to shelter in gold chihauhau flax.

She is cousin to the cuttlefish, paper nautilus, blue-ringed octopus, and the cowrie *Volva volva*, likewise related to pearl mussel, spiny oyster, naked sea butterfly and otter shell. She has claim therefore to intimacy with the eight-webbed coordinates of the sea, the rock hinges and latches of the will, jeweled hearts, the gliding nude bodies of all ocean angels.

The embodiment of abstraction, she is made kin to wavering underwater sun by the undulating thrust of her own locomotion. By her body parts having twisted 180 degrees in the egg, she has experienced every inverted aspect of above and below, within and without. And she has essential knowledge of left, for her shell opens always to the right.

She has touched even the inner stem  
of the human brain, for she alone gives rise  
to the slow caravan and self-sufficiency  
of snail dreams.

Now she is concentrating the meteorological  
elements of the evening in her damp, weighty  
moment-of-body in the palm of my hand.  
Held in the vise of my attention,  
see how she touches me and the one beyond  
me at my shoulder and the one beyond  
the one beyond...

Watch now and be alert. What foundations  
are jarred, what histories shaken  
by the beginning turn and stretch  
of her four horns, the advancing quiver  
of her tilting case?

**Pattiann Rogers**  
**OLD, OUTMODED POEMS**

...we talked of ancient times,  
analyzed the moon and discussed the flowers.  
—Shen Fu, *Six Records of a Floating Life*

I.  
Remember those days when the lighthouse  
lords sat on the mountainside  
by The Reign of Waterfalls, lounging  
in their brocade leggings and wren-skin  
slippers? Women, barefoot, wearing only  
gold gauze skirts, nursed young soldiers  
at their breasts, cradling those shaggy  
heads, their full nipples drawn deep  
into the boys' sweet, milk-lined  
mouths. During that season, dying petals  
from the pear tree and the laurelcherry  
fell through the cast of the sun  
in a fragrant language of succour  
and augury around them all day.

II.  
In such times we held our knuckles  
to the bald skull of the moon, knocking  
on light, tracing that brilliant  
surface with our fingers—the crevasse  
of amativeness, the knob of scholarly  
bliss, the blue vein of short-lived sublimity.  
One face beside me was a blind moon  
sunk deep in a black hood. We whispered  
among ourselves, quickly reciting psychic  
lunar runes, when an ink blot of cloud  
crossed suddenly over, covering  
for some seconds the only white, white  
declaration of validity existing  
in the broadest stone sea visible above us.

III.  
We examined first the tiny green blooms  
of the hairy fandella fern webbed  
by tiny green fandella spiders,  
then the fourteen cities of bronze  
chrysanthemums and the lavender rumor  
of lilacs in the dark. In the garden later,  
his head on my thigh, he edged one finger  
tenderly all the way down into the rouge  
funnel of the quivering lily blossom lying  
in my lap. We understood, in the moments  
of the union, the raptures and griefs  
of all honey-seeking Apidae, the needs  
existing in the vast spinning vortexes  
of all stellar nations to come.



## FEATURED WRITER

STEPHEN DOBYNS:  
DECEPTIONSIntroduction by  
Ron McFarland

Distinguished Visiting Writer in poetry for the Spring 1993 semester at the University of Idaho was Stephen Dobyns, who directs the creative writing program at Syracuse University. Since receiving his MFA degree from the University of Iowa Writers Workshop, Dobyns has produced seven collections of poems, with his eighth, *Velocities: Poems 1966-1992*, scheduled for publication by Viking in 1994.

He has also written fifteen novels, including seven in his Saratoga mystery series. *Saratoga Haunting* is slated for release by Viking later this year, and his novel *The Wrestler's Cruel Study* will be published by Norton in the fall. Dobyns read from his poems before an enthusiastic crowd the evening of March 3rd at the UI Law School Courtroom.

**O**n the desk where I write, I keep a nineteenth-century clay statue about a foot tall from Santiago, Chile. It shows a dwarf dressed in a jester's costume hunched over and laughing. But it is not a pretty laugh. The dwarf's knees are bent, his arms are behind his back, his ugly face is thrust forward. It is the donkey's bray, the horse laugh of mockery. I keep it on my desk to remind me that I am practicing a deception, not only to the world, but to myself.

In my poetry, I believe I always try to describe the world. No matter how fabulous or extravagant the poem, one of its intentions is to chart the world in which it is being written. It comes into existence when emotion suddenly links with image, idea and language, and what is constructed is a metaphor that stands for some aspect of my relations to my fellow creatures and the world around me. It is a verbal box which conveys feeling.

In my novels, whether mystery novels or serious fiction, I try to create alternative worlds. They may resemble this world but each creates a world which is someplace else. This is partly the nature of the novel. One of the subjects of a novel is the society in which it was written. As the Irish short-story

writer, Frank O'Connor, once wrote, any novel posits an ideal society and then creates its own society which, as it were, is set alongside the ideal society. The novel's commentary on society lies within the difference between the posited ideal and the society within the novel. This is part of the power of Kafka's novels, that discrepancy between an ideal society and the society found in *The Trial* or *The Castle*. But to some degree this is true of any novel, even a mystery novel.

So in my poetry I believe I deal with the existing world and in my novels with alternative worlds. If I feel badly about the world, dislike its people, feel pessimistic about its future, then I can't write poetry. Fiction I can write at any time, because it is not connected to my immediate feelings about the world. I don't need to love my fellow man in order to write it.

One writes a poem when one is so taken up by an emotional concept that one is unable to remain silent. This is something Philip Larkin describes in a short essay called "The Pleasure Principle," but it is also reminiscent of the prescription that William Wordsworth laid down in his preface to the second edition of *The Lyrical Ballads*. It is the standard Romantic formula for how a poem gets written. One writes when one is unable to remain silent and what one does is to make a small machine out of words that recreates the same feeling in another human being, any time, any place—meaning that without the reader there can be no poem.

It can even be argued that it is the reader who makes the poem, because if the ideal reader cannot recreate the emotion out of the poet's words, then no poem exists. Likewise, the reader has to be able to make the emotion his emotion. It is not enough for the reader to understand, to be a witness to somebody else's experience. So it can be said that the poem is not about the writer but the reader, and that

without this link to the reader the poem is only a jumble of words.

A novel handles this differently. It is roomier. It contains lots of time. Stories are told, people go on journeys. I write a novel when an incident comes together with a character and language to make a narrative. A novel creates an alternative world; a poem creates a metaphor for an aspect of the existing world. The world within the novel may also be a metaphor—as in Camus's *The Plague*—but it is still a complete world. Neither poem or novel can exist without the reader, but in the novel the reader is farther away. A poem invites the reader into its room; with the novel the reader walks around the fence surrounding the house. With a poem one often creates a single experience, with the novel a body of experience. With a poem the connection with the reader is more physical: because of the noise of the poem, its rhythms and music, because of the intensity of its emotion, the connection with the reader can feel more intimate.

But if I feel hostile toward the world and dislike its people, I can't write poetry—there is nothing I wish to say to that reader on the other side of the page except Go Away. For me, writing a poem is to engage with the world; writing a novel is to escape from its immediacy. W.H. Auden claimed that people write novels because they have no lives of their own. Novelists, of course, deny this. While I also deny it, I also feel that when I am writing a novel, I am stepping out of my life to enter another, while in poetry I feel I am intensifying my life.

I would find it impossible to write without a conception of the reader, that impossibly ideal figure who holds the other end of the string. He or she is the person I am talking to. The writing of both fiction and poetry entails the accumulation of verbal information intended to create emotional experiences meant to affect the reader. Not only is language information, but

so is tone, rhythm, syntax, line length—all elements of writing. And what the writer does with these elements is not simply to tell a story or present an emotional concept, he makes the reader want to know, makes him want to find out what happens next. From the very first sentence, from even the title, the writer is concerned with engaging and controlling the reader's interest.

The writer has his original intuition which may come in a rush, but then he must sort it out. In fact, one of the reasons a writer writes is to discover the nature of that intuition. But once the writer begins to make that intuition meaningful to a reader, then he begins to engage in reason and calculation. The process of writing and revising is the process of the writer becoming conscious of his intuition. The writer also calculates the effect of his words on the reader—what piece of information should be placed first, what second and third? Certainly it was calculation that led Kafka to begin "The Metamorphosis" with the sentence "As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect." Mr. Kafka must have laughed and slapped his knee. He knew that after reading that sentence, it would be impossible for the reader not to read a second and a third.

The British mystery writer Margery Allingham once described the writing of her first novel. She was an adolescent and both of her parents were writers. Suddenly the housekeeper dashed into her room. "Your mother's upstairs writing lies in one room!" shouted the housekeeper. "Your father's upstairs writing lies in another, and now you're writing lies as well. I won't have it!" Whereupon the housekeeper tore up the manuscript.

There has always been a sense that a fiction, a novel, is no more than a series of lies. This is why many people

prefer to read biography or history. They would prefer to read about Madonna than Anna Karenina. Madonna is real, Anna Karenina is not. The counter argument runs that the novel tries to distill the very essence of life, even that art creates life.

Even so, when I write a novel, part of me knows that I am engaged in a deception. Not that I am lying or the novel is a lie, but that I am creating a fictional world that I want the reader to believe in. I am creating a verbal illusion. At the same time I like to see how much I can get away with. But I also have to deliver. If I promise an amazing experience, I have to provide that experience. The first sentence of Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" isn't a trick; it is entirely in keeping with the nature of the story. One makes the reader want to believe, makes the reader want to know what comes next. But if the writer betrays that promise, then he has failed. After all, he is an entertainer. No matter how seriously I take my poetry and fiction, I know that I am descended from the court jester.

This returns me to my Chilean dwarf and his mocking laugh. One of the reasons I keep him on my desk is to remind me of my connection to the reader, to remind me of the theater, that I am creating an illusion and that illusion is a deception.

That is a lesser reason for the dwarf. A greater reason is to remind me that I am lying to myself. The dwarf's mocking laughter is aimed at me. How foolish, he says. How ridiculous.

When I first began to write, I was concerned with being clear and logical and learning how to move the pieces around. I am still concerned with this but more recently I have come to understand that my greatest enemy is self-deception; that is, that I lie to myself about what I am writing. A writer is always engaged in making choices based on some idea of cause and effect. What interferes with this, as much as

any lack of skill, is self-deception, that I lie to myself about what works and doesn't work, what is necessary or unnecessary. And my Chilean statue stands there to remind me of the lie.

When I write, I have certain desires. I want the piece to work and I want it to be finished. Beyond that I may want it to reflect credit on me, to make me respected or liked, to bring me financial reward. My self-deception falls into two categories—how I deal with the work and how I deal with myself in relation to the work: that is, matters within the work and matters outside the work. At some level a piece of writing must be written only for its own sake. It tries to encapsulate an emotional experience. To be successful it must separate itself from the life of the writer. If I want the work to reflect credit on me or make me respected, then I am engaged in self-deception. The deception is that the work can remain tied to the writer, even that it expresses him. The finished piece of writing belongs to the reader, not the writer. If the work is successful, the writer has become invisible.

It is even a deception to link the writing to financial reward. One lessens a novel or poem by writing first of all for publication. If something works, then it will be published. But to write while imagining a future for what one is writing means that some aesthetic choices will be governed by reasons outside the work. It may lead to making conservative choices for fear of offending a future editor; and it will make one think in terms of scenes and lines, of small effects rather than the whole effect. For not only does the piece of writing have to transcend the writer, it must also transcend itself. It must amount to more than the sum of its parts. That is a difference between art and journalism. A writer can keep this from happening by trying to guide what he is writing toward a specific future, for instance the achieving of fame and fortune.

An interviewer once asked John

LeCarre why he continued to write. He was rich, famous and in good health so why didn't he retire and enjoy life. LeCarre said, "When writing is going well, the money doesn't matter; and when it's going badly, the money doesn't help." That is the answer of someone who puts the writing over the publishing.

That I want a book to make me rich and famous is a self-deception that stands outside the work. Others are less obvious. For instance, it is a self-deception to think that the reader doesn't matter. It is a self-deception not to believe, as Coleridge said, that poetry is the best words in the best order. The same is true of good fiction. All aesthetic theories become self-deception if they are embraced too tightly. No theory can be more important than the work itself.

The more difficult forms of self-deception exist inside the work. What do you think the work is about? Why do you think it is funny, sad or true? Why do you feel you have said too little, too much or just enough?

The Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert once said in an interview: "To extract meaning is our primary task." But it isn't enough to extract meaning, the writer must also communicate it. The self-deception affects what one thinks constitutes meaning, how one extracts it and how one communicates it. What is it for something to be meaningful? Is it meaningful only to me? Why should anyone else care about it? As human beings we not only have a need to extract meaning, we also have a need to be right. This need to have a corner on truth is a powerful source of self-deception. The writer must constantly challenge his opinions. Indeed, he should have as few opinions as possible.

A common self-deception for beginning writers has to do with clarity. Because the writer has the clearest idea of what he is writing, he often falls into the error of thinking it is equally clear to a reader. This is never true. The

writer knows all the referents and connections; the reader doesn't. It is extremely hard for the writer to read his work from the point of view of the reader: to read dumb, as it were. Yet if the writer can't do this, there is little hope of success. In such a reading, the writer has to give up all theories and become a complete pragmatist. He must ask himself constantly: What am I trying to do? He must measure his words against his intention and demand how each word, sentence or image contributes to the whole.

Another self-deception caused by the writer's superior knowledge of the work is the failure to guard against alternative meanings. The writer often knows so well what he is trying to say that he assumes that his words convey it. But words are ambiguous. Too often the writer is reading something in his brain, rather than something on the page. I remember a student poem which described some soldiers being sent off to war. It was the last night of basic training and the soldiers sat on their cots sharing a couple of cigarettes, handing them back and forth. The writer used the line, "We passed out butts from mouth to mouth." So clearly did the writer hold his intended meaning in his mind, that he failed to read what he had written.

Another form of self-deception comes from being mistaken as to what is necessary to the work. When has one said too much or too little? Any piece of writing has an ideal number of words. To go over or under even by one word is to diminish the success of the finished piece. This is hard to calculate, but it means strictly defining to oneself what the piece is about and what one is trying to do. If the writer says too little, it is often because he is being too reticent or feels his point is already clear. If he says too much, it is because he feels the point is obscure, or because he is too much in love with his language, or because he is self-indulgent, or simply unsure. It is a common mistake in a first novel for the

writer to pack in all sorts of extraneous but fascinating detail because he feels that his main story is not sufficiently interesting.

About seven years ago I went through my second published novel, *Saratoga Longshot*, editing it for a paperback edition. Ten years and ten other books stood between the original writing and editing. I was amazed at the material I had included because I had thought it necessary — extraneous detail and background, unnecessary explanations and motivation. Without rewriting, I cut ten percent, and if I had chosen to rewrite, I could have shortened the book by fifteen percent. This was a depressing discovery. I had not hurried over that book. I had spent a year on it, saw it through four drafts and it was as good as I could have made it at the time. Yet I had constantly over-explained myself, used two details where one would do, put in details that existed for their own sakes and failed to define each part by the needs of the whole. It was full of self-deception.

It was then I began to keep my Chilean dwarf on the desk where I work. Liar, it says. You haven't done enough, it says.

But there is a third issue symbolized by the dwarf. The jester laughs at the king, yet the jester himself has nothing. The dwarf reminds me of that mixture of gall and humility which one must have in order to write. You see, self-deception is also necessary. It is one of the writer's basic tools. He must have the self-confidence, the gall, to break the silence, to feel that what he says is worth hearing. This is why it is easier for the young to write. They don't worry that what they say may be unimportant. It is also why so many British poets were outsiders who lacked a traditional education and didn't go to Oxford or Cambridge where they would have been told that being a poet was a very serious affair and much too serious for the likes of them. Nobody told John Keats he

couldn't be a poet and so his gall remained intact.

Graduate writing students tend to write far more cautiously than undergraduates. In those few years the graduate writing students have assumed the burden of history. Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton sit on their shoulders. They are more concerned with what they can't do than with what they can. They are afraid of appearing inadequate so they constantly censor themselves or push their work into obscurity where their intentions can't be seen.

The function of gall is to allow the original intuition to express itself without being interfered with by the conscious mind. In Freudian terms, it allows the unconscious to express itself without interference from the super-ego. Hesitancy is the surest destroyer of talent. One cannot be timorous and reticent; one must be original and loud. New metaphors, new rhythms, new expressions of emotion can only spring from unhindered gall. Nothing should interfere with that intuition—not the fear of appearing stupid, nor of offending somebody, nor jeopardizing publication, nor being trivial. The intuition must be as unhindered as a karate chop.

But once the intuition, in all its rawness, is sprawled on the page, then it must be turned into a poem or piece of fiction. This is where the humility comes in. In order to make the piece successful, the writer must place his needs and wishes after the needs of what he is writing. He must determine what the intuition is saying and guide it in that direction. Ideally, the writer moves from total intuition to total consciousness, from the completely subjective to the completely objective. After the original intuition, the writer does make the piece so much as allow it to come into being. The poet Osip Mandelstam talked about the revision process as being like the process of memory: that a glimpse of the whole piece comes in a flash and the writer

spends months and years trying to remember it exactly.

But to do this, the writer must set aside his ego. He must listen to the work and not to himself. He must be careful not to censor or limit the work for reasons that stand outside the work. A work of art is the expression of the artist's whole self, not just of his ego. The two are very different. A poem or work of fiction doesn't have enough room for both the writer's ego and the reader. The finished work, after all, belongs to the reader. It is where he finds his own life reflected. After the original intuition, the writer's role is to make sure that happens.

A work of art gives testimony as to what it is to be a human being. It bears witness, it extracts meaning. A work of art is also the clearest non-physical way that emotion is communicated from one human being to another. The emotion isn't referred to; it is recreated. It shows us that our most private feelings are in fact shared feelings. And this offers us some relief from our existential isolation.

When I first began writing, I felt I had to do little more than to learn my craft to be successful. What I have been describing was for me a rude discovery—that even though I was learning, I was also lying to myself about what I had learned, that throughout the whole revision process I was lying about what worked and what didn't. I will always lie to myself—that is the nature of the beast—but I don't want to forget I am doing it. Maybe I can catch a few lies and make the work better. So I let this little statue face me as I work—hunched over, eyes squinched shut, mouth open in a donkey bray of mockery. ☐

## SHORT STORY

## TA O

Jennifer Deckert

**A**lternating seasons of San Joaquin Valley heat and fog had faded the sign's letters beyond recognition. Not that it mattered much, Graham thought as he glanced up at the weathered piece of wood above the door. Pop's Ice Cream Parlor had been there so long, tucked between the Sloane Video Hut and Ramona's Beauty-O-Rama, that it didn't need a sign.

As the glass door swooshed open, a cowbell tied to the inside handle announced Graham's arrival. The shop was deserted. A musty, sweet smell slapped against his face, urging Graham's childhood memories forward.

The ice cream parlor hadn't changed much. It was as if time had spent so much energy on aging Pop's sign outside that it was too exhausted to touch the inside. Pop's original glass counter still ran along the far wall, the ice cream drums hidden behind a smear of fingerprints. Huddled in one corner were the same three white table and chair sets that Graham had tripped over every day as a boy. Even the straw wrapper spit wads Graham and his friends had shot whenever Pop was out of the room still clung to the ceiling tiles.

"Coming," a voice boomed from the back room. Strains of television

noise drifted into the ice cream parlor as Pop's pigeon-colored head peaked around the corner.

"Well, Graham Carter!" Pop sounded surprised, as if he hadn't called Graham that morning and asked him to stop by. "I haven't seen you in a donkey's years. You used to come by every day after school. Rain or shine, I could always count on Graham Carter."

Guilty pinpricks stung Graham's memories. "Well, I've been pretty busy." Graham knew it was a lame excuse for not coming to see Pop in over twenty years, but it was all he could think of to say.

"Let's see, you were a double scoop strawberry on a sugar cone fan if I remember right," Pop said, moving behind the glass counter.

The floor was tacky against the bottom of Graham's shoes, as if it had been waxed with melted ice cream. Graham stepped up to the counter, noticing that time had bypassed Pop as well. His face seemed no older than it had two decades before. His eyes, such a pale shade of blue they looked almost white, still sparkled as if he was about to tell a particularly bad joke. Even the stains on Pop's t-shirt looked familiar.

Suddenly, Graham was eight years old again. The October afternoon sun thickened the sweet air. The shop was crowded with kids eager to hear one of Pop's stories.

Raising on his tiptoes, Graham set his nickel on the counter. He pressed

a runny nose against the glass. "Where'd you get your nickname, Pop?" Graham asked him once more.

"In the navy. It's short for Pop-eye." Pop winked at Graham. A tattoo illustrated each of Pop's bulging forearms; an eagle with a snake in its claws on one, and a mermaid on the other. Graham watched as the mermaid dipped eagerly into the drum of strawberry ice cream. Much of his childhood was spent thinking of that tattoo. She was the inspiration for Graham's first sexual experience.

"Used to be you could call it strawberry and that'd be the end of it," Pop said, wrenching Graham from his daydream. "Now they make up all these fancy names. This one's called 'Creme Fraises.'" Pop pronounced it 'Creme Fraysies.' "I think it's Italian for 'You moron it's strawberry.'" Pop chuckled, his belly jiggling like lumpy pudding. He handed the double cone to Graham. "And you know what 'Belgian White Chocolate Macadamia' is? Just plain old vanilla with a shot of almond extract." Pop laughed again. "They might be fooling some folks, but if the navy taught me anything, it was to see a snowjob coming from a mile away."

Graham smiled as chunks of Pop's navy stories resurfaced in his mind. As a boy, Graham had listened with rapt attention while Pop described the exotic ports he visited. Pop became a legend to Graham, his own comic book parlor filled with mysterious souvenirs from Pop's travels. Maybe even a trunk of buried treasure and a mermaid or two. It wasn't until Graham was approaching his tenth birthday that he discovered the real purpose of Pop's back room.

"You're dripping," Pop said.

Graham looked up. "Huh?"

"Your ice cream. It's dripping."

"Oh." Graham's tongue swiped at the trickle of ice cream that threatened to run across his fingers.

"I hear you're working over at Foothill Citrus now," Pop said as he

helped himself to a spoonful of chocolate mousse.

"Yeah. I got promoted to leading foreman a couple of years back." Graham rotated the cone, his tongue smoothing the ice cream like a potter's hands on a piece of clay.

"That's great," Pop said. His voice sobered. "And I'm sorry to hear about that pretty wife of yours. Dolores, right?"

Graham nodded. He didn't have to ask how Pop knew he and Dolores were separated. Gossip was a popular sport in Sloane.

"I guess I've been lucky," Pop continued. "Betty's threatened to leave me plenty of times, but she's stuck in there. That's one good thing about marrying a home town girl. Even if she does leave you, chances are she won't go too far." Pop smiled, showing teeth like vanilla ice cream cones.

Graham ignored the slight jab that he would have done better to marry a girl from Sloane. He didn't want to talk about Dolores.

"How've you been, Pop?"

"Could be better, could be worse."

Graham bit into the sugar cone. It was stale.

"I appreciate you coming to see me on your lunch hour," Pop said.

Graham waved his hand nonchalantly. "I've been meaning to come in, say hello. But you know..."

"You've been busy," Pop finished for him and nodded. He dipped the plastic spoon into the tub of amaretto praline brittle. "I guess you're wondering why I asked you here."

The spoon disappeared into Pop's mouth. Graham waited, his lips numb and sticky.

"I have something to show you. It's in the back."

A juvenile thrill slithered along Graham's spine as Pop indicated for Graham to follow. The back room. After all these years he was finally going



to see the back room.

Graham thought back to the day he'd overheard his parents discussing Pop's behind their bedroom door.

"It's not healthy for Graham to be spending so much time there." His mother's voice was high and defensive.

"I don't see any harm in it, dear," his father countered.

"Well, what about the things that go on in that back room?"

Graham pressed his ear against the door to hear better.

"It's just a tattoo parlor, for God's sake. You make it sound like a sex shop."

A tattoo parlor? Graham was both curious and disappointed. What about Pop's buried treasure? What about the mermaids?

"But the sort of people that get tattoos. Bikers and hoodlums and junkies."

His father laughed. "I doubt Pop would let those kind of people hang around the children. Besides, he only tattoos after shop hours."

"How do you know?" Her tone was accusing.

Graham couldn't hear his father's reply.

"I still don't like the idea of Graham being there," his mother said. "What if Pop talks him into getting a tattoo?"

"I used to go into Pop's as a boy, and I don't have any tattoos."

"You didn't spend nearly as much time with Pop as Graham does."

"Graham doesn't spend nearly as much time with Pop as his wife does, and she doesn't have any tattoos. At least none that I know of." Laughter seeped through the door. "Can you imagine Betty covered with tattoos? Maybe a unicorn on her thigh. Or a rose, right... here...?"

His mother giggled. Their voices lowered beyond eavesdropping level.

Graham hurried to his room, his ten-year-old mind spinning with the new knowledge. Pop was a tattoo artist. Why hadn't he mentioned it to Gra-

ham? Two years of stories and not one word about doing tattoos in the back room.

After that day, the back room had seemed even more intriguing to Graham. But Graham had never been invited inside. Not until now.

He followed Pop past the counter and through the narrow doorway. Air heavy with age settled on Graham's shoulders. The glow from the TV in the corner showed a room cluttered with dark, bulky shapes, like crouching dinosaurs. Graham felt an unexpected trickle of fear as he waited for his eyes to adjust to the blackness.

Biting off his end of the sugar cone, Graham sucked the remaining ice cream through the hole at the bottom. The action, so familiar from his childhood, was comforting.

The dinosaurs slowly transformed into a haphazard assortment of furniture. Pop stood before a mammoth bookcase jammed with folders and books. "Let's see," he said, running a sticky finger along the bindings. "I know it's here someplace. Ahhh." Pop slid a book from the second shelf. He held it like a priceless piece of art. "Did I ever tell you about the old Thai man that taught me how to tattoo?" he asked.

Graham shook his head. "I don't think so."

"It wasn't too long after I joined the navy. I was in Bangkok, going to meet my buddies at a bar. The street was crowded, but the old man stood out as if he was the only one there. At first I thought he was wearing a dark blue shirt. Then I realized his chest and arms were covered with tattoos. Maybe it was the heat that made me see it. Bangkok can be miserable in April. Or maybe I had gone too long without an American beer. But as he walked toward me, those tattoos squirmed across his skin like live animals.

"He saw me staring at him. 'You like my tattoos?' he asked. 'I can teach you the secret, if you like.'

"I followed him like a stray pup, forgetting all about my friends waiting for me. When we reached his home, it was like walking into another world. The rooms were small and dingy, but mystical somehow. Every word he spoke was a proverb, full of meaning. It consumed me.

"He tattooed my back with one of his designs, and as he showed me the way back to the dock, he gave me this book. 'Keep it safe for me,' he said. 'This is the only copy of my designs.' Then he disappeared into the crowd.

"When I went back to Bangkok a few years later, I tried to find the old man. But there was no trace of him. I didn't even know his name. All these years I've kept the book safe for him. And now I'm asking you to keep it safe, as a favor to me."

"But why?" Graham asked, chewing the last of his cone.

"I'm ready to move on, Graham." Pop said the last words simply and without emotion, as if he was telling Graham it might rain the following Tuesday. "I'm dying."

"Dying?" Graham choked out the word.

"I'd like you to have this book. It would mean a lot to me."

Dozens of questions stumbled over each other in Graham's mind. Only the shortest one found its way off his numbed tongue. "Why me?"

"You were always my favorite, Graham. The only one to come back day after day. This book needs someone like you."

Game show applause burst from the television as Graham accepted the book. It was heavier than he had imagined.

"But Pop... how... I mean... the doctors... can't they..."

Pop shook his head.

"Is there anything you need? Something I can do for you?"

"I don't suppose you'd want a tattoo. Sort of my grand finale?"

Graham laughed and then real-

ized Pop was serious. Even in the dim light Pop's eyes pierced Graham's skin, the irises lightning bolt white.

"I remember a time when you wanted to be just like me." Pop's voice was like melted steel. "Do you remember that, Graham?"

Graham remembered. Many times he had told Pop exactly that. But he'd been ten years old then. Over the years, other things had taken priority, covering over his boyhood dreams like flies on fresh roadkill.

"No offense, Pop, but I was just a kid then. Tattoos aren't all that appealing to me anymore."

"Sure, sure," Pop said. "It was just a spur of the moment idea. No big deal. Want some more ice cream? I've got a new flavor this month. White raspberry truffle."

"No thanks," Graham said. "I've got to get back to work." He tucked the book under his arm and followed Pop through the ice cream parlor.

"Thanks for stopping by, Graham. I feel better knowing the book will be well taken care of."

Graham felt a touch of uneasiness. "Has the doctor told you... how long you have?"

Pop shook his head. "I haven't seen a doctor."

"Then how —"

"One thing the old Thai man said to me was that it's a dangerous thing to ask too many questions. Did I mention that before?"

Graham hesitated and then smiled. "No, you didn't. Thanks for the book, Pop. And the ice cream."

"Next time we'll set you up with a double scoop of white raspberry truffle," Pop said.

The cowbell clanged against the glass as Graham stepped into the fresh air outside. He looked at his watch and was surprised to see only fifteen minutes had passed since he entered Pop's.

When Graham got home that night, the dark house attacked him like a rabid dog. Graham quickly turned on the TV to fight off the uncomfortable

silence. Canned laughter spilled across the livingroom and into the kitchen.

Another macaroni and cheese night, Graham thought as he set the pot on the stove. Waiting for the water to boil, he took out the book Pop had given him. Again Graham was surprised at its weight; it felt as if the pages were made of granite. The musty smell of Pop's back room drifted up from the frayed book cover. Most of the gold lettering had flaked off the front; all that remained of the title was "TA O."

As Graham opened the book, the ancient smell shot up his sinuses. It molded into a quick headache that pulsed against the bridge of his nose. Graham frowned and looked down at the first page.

Contradicting the book's cover, the inside pages seemed untouched by age. Bright slashes of color sprang out at Graham. The images needed no words to describe the texture and sound and smell of the jungle scenes. They drew Graham in, hypnotic in their sensuality. The headache forgotten, Graham turned the pages eagerly.

By the time Graham reached the last page, his mind had transformed the kitchen into a jungle. The musty book smell became fertile earth. Hot, wet air pressed against his temples. Leopards peered at Graham like voyeurs from the lush foliage. Thick vines dangled from branches overhead. Reptiles slithered along the base of tree trunks, their tongues flicking in and out. In the distance, a trio of lions roared.

Something hissed nearby. A boa constrictor, Graham thought as he turned around. Then he realized it was the water boiling over. Graham shut the book and leapt out of his chair to salvage his dinner. The kitchen slammed back into place as the jungle images retreated.

After his stomach was sufficiently filled, Graham reopened the book to the last page. His excitement was quickly rekindled.

You're acting like a kid sneaking looks at his first dirty magazine, Gra-

ham scolded himself. But something about the design's rich colors and intricate, swirling lines suggested more. Something mysterious and erotic and alive. Was this the Thai man's secret, Graham wondered. Could he tattoo the design, so that they seemed to move across the body? And had he passed the knowledge onto Pop?

Suddenly, Graham wanted to see the tattoo the old man had done on Pop's back. He could stop by the next day and thank him again for the book. Then he'd suggest Pop show off his tattoo.

Graham could feel his boyhood fascination for tattoos creeping back. For years he'd dreamt of having tattoos just like Pop. When had it stopped, Graham wondered. He thought back, ticking off the years.

Dolores. It had been when he met Dolores. She hated tattoos, and had forged her opinion onto Graham. Her technique was so subtle, Graham hadn't even realized it happened. Until now.

Boy would she be pissed if I got a tattoo, Graham thought. A wide, easy smile spread across his face.

The cowbell sent out its noisy greeting as Graham pushed open the glass door. Just like the day before, the shop was deserted. The musty, sweet smell drifted up from the sticky floor.

"Coming," Pop called from the back room. He peeked around the corner. "Well, Graham Carter! What a surprise!"

Graham felt an unsettling sense of *deja vu*. Perhaps Pop's was locked in its own time pocket, and they were about to replay yesterday's scene. Graham imagined himself returning day after day, reciting the same dialogue, and leaving each time with the tattoo book tucked under his arm.

"Hi, Pop."

"Glad to see you back so soon. Are you here for the white raspberry truffle or did you change your mind about that tattoo?"

Pop's words flooded relief though Graham. Real time slipped back into place. "Both," Graham said. It hadn't occurred to him until just then that he had decided to get a tattoo.

"Great. Let's get you started on the ice cream, and then we'll talk about that tattoo."

"I also wanted to thank you again for the book."

"I thought you'd like it. That old man had a real gift," Pop said as he dug into the drum of ice cream.

"The tattoo he gave you... do you suppose I could see it?"

Pop frowned as he handed the ice cream cone to Graham. "Tattoo?"

"Yeah. The one on your back."

Pop's eyes were white marbles. "I don't have a tattoo on my back."

"But you told me yesterday that the old man tattooed your back with one of his designs."

Pop shook his head. "You must have misunderstood. He only gave me the book of tattoos."

Graham took a bite of the ice cream. A sharp pain ran across the back of his teeth. He was sure Pop had said the old man tattooed his back. Why was Pop denying it now?

"I'll show you my back, if you don't believe me," Pop said.

Graham responded slowly as his mind tried to recall their conversation from the day before. "No, that's okay. I must have heard you wrong." Had he really misunderstood? Doubt began to sift through his confidence.

"What type of tattoo do you want? An anchor? A skull? Or maybe a mermaid?" Pop's eyes sparkled as if he knew all about Graham's pubescent mermaid fantasies.

"What about one of the old man's designs?" Graham was surprised at his words. It was as if his tongue was working independently of his mind.

Pop smiled. "I was hoping you'd say that. I had a transfer made of the last page a few days ago."

"But how did you know I'd pick that one?"

"Just a hunch. We can get started Saturday morning. I normally like to tattoo a design that size in several sittings, but I don't have much time left. We'll work through the weekend. That okay with you?"

The unsettling feeling returned. It was all moving too fast, everything was too convenient. Graham couldn't quite pinpoint it, but something about Pop's eagerness disturbed him. He couldn't back out now, though. Pop's comment about not having much time left had hit a sympathetic spot in Graham. He couldn't refuse a dying man's last request. And there was always the cold revenge against Dolores to consider.

"Sure. This Saturday will be fine," Graham said.

Graham sat on the curb in front of Pop's Saturday morning, waving at the occasional car that passed by. The drivers' smiles suggested they knew Graham wasn't waiting just for ice cream.

Pop drove up in his '72 Chevy truck. The tires bounced against the curb and then settled back with a sigh. "Morning, Graham. Sorry I'm late. Betty broke the disposal again." Pop shook his head as he climbed out of the lemon sorbet-colored truck. "Women."

"Can't live with 'em, can't shoot 'em," Graham added.

Pop's hearty laugh boomed through the cool morning air. "You got that right."

Graham stumbled over an out-of-place chair as he followed Pop through the darkened ice cream parlor. Again, he had the feeling that he'd stepped into an alternate time that ran at its own sweet, jerky pace.

"Watch out for that chair," Pop warned as he reached the back room. His hand snaked around the doorway and flipped the light switch. A naked bulb threw a half-hearted glow across the sleeping dinosaurs.

Graham wasn't sure if the bread dough panic rising in his throat was

caused by the cluttered room or his doubts. Was he doing the right thing? A tattoo, especially one that would cover a good portion of his back, was a permanent thing. It wasn't a decision to be made spontaneously. Like marriage, Graham thought bitterly.

Graham stood near the doorway as Pop maneuvered in the few feet of free space the dusty furniture allowed. Yellowed sheets of tattoo designs covered the walls, making the room seem even smaller.

Just let me clear off my work table, and we'll get started," Pop said. He lifted a small stack of newspapers, grunting like a weightlifter trying to set a new world record.

"Need some help, Pop?" Graham asked.

"No, I got it. Why don't you make some coffee? The machine's in the front behind the counter."

Graham nodded, glad to have something to occupy his mind. When he returned with two steaming mugs of coffee, Pop was setting out his equipment.

"I had these tools specially made in Guatemala. Or was it Barcelona? Anyway, they were crafted after the Thai man's tools. What I remember of them, at least. When he tattooed my—" Pop cut off the word abruptly and raised the coffee cup to his lips. He slurped the hot liquid. "I can't exactly remember the last tattoo I did. Might have been that man from Tulare. Wanted his boyfriend's name tattooed on his behind." Pop said the word with the emphasis on the first syllable: *bee*-hind. "I told him I don't do that sort of stuff, so he settled for a tulip on his arm. Must have been at least a year ago. Are you ready?"

Graham was no longer listening. Pop had slipped up; the Thai man had tattooed Pop's back. So why didn't Pop want him to know? Graham looked up. "I'm sorry, Pop. What did you say?"

"Have a hot date last night, Graham? You seem preoccupied."

None of your damned business, Graham thought, irritated by Pop's suggestive smirk. Then he realized Pop was trying to distract him. Graham bit back his sarcastic reply. "Just day-dreaming, I suppose." He took a gulp of coffee, hoping it would steady his fishing-wire nerves. It tasted like liquid dust.

"Why don't you take off your shirt and we'll get started."

The morning shuffled by like an old man in a worn robe and slippers. Pop worked at turtle speed, whistling show tunes as he transferred the tattoo onto Graham's back. The rubbing alcohol seeped into Graham's skin, cold and unfriendly.

Over two lunchtime marshmallow cream sundaes, Pop retold some of his navy stories. Graham noticed that some of the details had changed since the last time he'd heard them. As a boy, Graham had taken the stories as absolute fact, but now he thought perhaps they'd come from Pop's imagination all along. Fresh doubts scurried through his mind, and Graham wondered if it was too late to back out of the tattoo.

Pop stood up quickly. "Let's get back to work," he said as if he could read Graham's thoughts.

Graham returned to the hard stool. He flinched as the needle touched his back, more from the anticipation than pain.

"Now hold still or this'll be a big mess on your back instead of a tattoo." The needle buzzed behind him like a hovering insect. Graham gritted his teeth and held still as the ink poured into his pricked skin.

Pop worked steadily though the afternoon, interspersing his show tune whistling with navy stories. Graham said little as impatience grew inside him like a tapeworm. Pop's stories, once so fascinating, were now irritating tangles of drivel. The back room seemed to be collapsing like a dying animal, exhausted of energy and starving from lack of oxygen. Graham

fought the urge to scramble into the cleansing October air.

Finally, the persistent insect drone behind Graham stopped. "I think that's enough for today," Pop said. "You did good, Graham. Held still like a real trooper. Want to see what I've done so far?"

The bread dough panic was thick in Graham's throat now. He swallowed hard, hoping to send it back down to his gut. It lodged at the base of his tongue. "No thanks, Pop. I've got to get home."

"Another hot date tonight, eh? I don't suppose it's Shelly Traverns, is it? Nice, respectable Sloane girl, that Shelly. You two have a lot in common. I heard her husband took off for Reno a few months back to live with a twenty-two year old blackjack dealer."

Graham snatched at his shirt and punched his arms through the sleeves. "No, I don't have a date with Shelly Traverns. I just have a lot of things to do." It wasn't exactly the truth; Graham's only plans that night were with a box of macaroni and cheese. But the urge to get out of the choked room was desperate. "I'll see you tomorrow morning at eight, right?"

"Better make it nine. I have a feeling that disposal's going to act up again."

Graham nodded. He felt the room shrink another foot, the ceiling brushing against his head. As Graham stumbled outside, the cowbell on the door seemed to mock him.

Gulping giant lung-fulls of the night air, the panic slowly slid back down his throat. What had happened in there, Graham wondered as he fished his car keys from his pocket. It wasn't like him to get so spooked over nothing. And he'd practically bitten Pop's head off for that comment about Shelly. Pop had meant no harm. He was just a kind-hearted old man who liked to whistle show-tunes and tell sailor stories. And was dying soon. Pop's words from the day before returned to Graham, rising up from the

sidewalk: "I'm ready to move on."

Graham felt guilty that he had been so impatient with Pop. So what if his stories were as interesting as mud? At one time he'd been Graham's hero. Pop deserved better than to be treated like an old fool. As he climbed into his car, Graham promised himself he'd try to be more patient the next day.

But as the needle hummed to life Sunday morning, Graham's good intentions dissolved. The room enshrouded him, compressing the air to postage stamp thinness. Pop's show tunes were like sandpaper on sunburnt skin. A raw scream clawed up Graham's throat and then retreated. Time crawled by, backed up, slid sideways, and then meandered its way toward evening.

The needle's hum hiccuped and then stopped. Graham held his breath, afraid to ask if Pop was done. What if he said there were several hours of work left to be done? Graham didn't think he could stand it.

Pop sighed. Graham waited. "That'll about do it," Pop said.

The breath from his lungs escaped like a punctured tire. Had he heard right? Was the torture finally over? Graham's back stung like a n angry nest of mountain hornets.

"Want to take a look?" Pop asked.

"Sure," Graham said. His curiosity to see the results of the past two days squelched the bread dough panic. As Pop handed Graham a small mirror, the room widened to normal size.

"It'll take a couple weeks for the swelling to go down, but you'll be able to get the general idea," Pop said, producing a large, ancient-looking mirror from behind a stack of boxes. He balanced it on the work table while Graham turned and held up the hand mirror.

No. It couldn't be. Graham closed his eyes and looked again. His expectations shattered. His back looked as if it had been splattered with house

paint. No writhing animals, no hypnotically swirling lines, no bright slashes of sensual color. Only a static mass of ink.

"So what do you think?" Pop asked.

"I—" He couldn't tell Pop the truth. The old man would be devastated.

Graham swallowed hard. "I'm speechless, Pop. Thanks," he managed.

Pop's eyes glowed in the mirror's reflection. "I'm glad you like it."

Graham carefully set the hand mirror on the table. "How much do I owe you?"

"Consider it a gift."

"No, Pop. That was a lot of work, and I can imagine how much it would've cost me in a regular tattoo parlor. Please, let me pay you."

"You've already paid me," Pop said quietly. His blue-white eyes burned uncomfortable holes into Graham's disappointment. "You granted my last request. Thank you."

Graham's forced smile turned to a wince as Pop bandaged the tattoo.

"Make sure you keep that clean," Pop said. "We wouldn't want it to get infected."

"Thanks again, Pop."

"Sure. Take care of yourself." Something in his tone sounded so final, as if Pop knew he wouldn't see Graham again. But if the doctor hadn't told Pop he was dying, how did he know, Graham wondered. Pop's words rang in his head as they had the night before. "I'm ready to move on." Maybe Pop wasn't dying after all. Maybe he was just tired of living.

"I'll come visit you soon, Pop."

Pop smiled. "I know. Goodbye, Graham."

Colorful scabs studded Graham's skin, mercifully disguising the design. His back seesawed between itching like a mountain range of mosquito bites and stinging like a vat of battery acid. Fortunately, the busy orange packing season at work kept Graham

from thinking about his failed tattoo much.

Two weeks zipped by before Graham remembered his promise to visit Pop. He decided to drop in the next day during his lunch hour for a quick hello and maybe a double scoop strawberry cone.

As he pulled into the parking space in front of Pop's, Graham's chest hitched painfully. A closed sign hung against the door.

Maybe he has the flu and stayed home, Graham thought as he held his hand to the glass and peered through the darkened window. But he knew that wasn't the case; Pop's prophecy had come true.

Word of Pop's death didn't reach Sloane's gossip circuit until mid afternoon. The town buzzed with speculation about the details. A heart attack, a stroke, cancer maybe. No one suggested he was simply ready to move on.

Graham was locked in his own thoughts about Pop's death. Maybe he could have done something to prevent it—taken Pop to the doctor or convinced him to go on a diet. Instead, he had spent the past two weeks selfishly wrapped up in his own life. He should have done something. Now it was too late.

By the time he got home that night, Graham was exhausted. His back tingled with hot pinpricks of pain. Bypassing his macaroni and cheese feast, he went straight to bed.

Graham dreamt he was in the tattoo design jungle. The air clung to his skin like a wet wool blanket. A lizard slid over his right foot.

Something shifted in the greenery nearby. "Who's there?" Graham called. The wings of a giant bird shuddered overhead. He could see nothing in the dense greenness.

The leaves rustled again. "Is someone there?" Graham called.

A crash sounded behind him. Graham whirled just as a black shape lunged from the foliage. Its mouth

was wide, exposing long, yellowish teeth that aimed straight for his neck. Graham screamed, waking himself up.

The clock radio glowed thirty-thirty. As Graham's back stung with sweat, his mind buzzed with the memory of the dream. It had seemed so realistic; he could still feel the moist earth between his toes.

Graham pulled a hand mirror from the bathroom drawer. In two weeks, he'd only looked at his back once. It had been an ugly mass of thick scabs.

Now as Graham looked in the mirror, hot breath lodged in his throat. His back had transformed into the Thai man's design, just like the jungle in his dream.

The illusion of movement was incredible. Images seemed to ripple across Graham's back. He saw the panther from his dream waiting to pounce from the tropical ferns. The lizard that scurried across Graham's foot now paused across a mossy tree trunk. Twin snakes slithered along the moist ground.

Too excited to sleep, Graham watched the scene until it was time to go to work.

The tattoo occupied his thoughts all day. Graham couldn't wait to get home that night and strip off his shirt. He watched the tattoo in the bathroom mirror until his eyes blurred with exhaustion.

As soon as he fell asleep, the jungle dream returned. Again, Graham had the feeling of being watched.

"Who's there?" he called. A pale flash of skin showed from the foliage, but there was no answer. Graham continued. "I know you're there. I can see you."

Slowly, the patch of skin moved forward. An old man appeared, his face rained with wrinkles. The naked body below it was thin, but gave no indication of frailty. The man stepped into the clearing.

"Who are you?" Graham asked.

"My name is unimportant." The

man's voice resonated through the trees. "I've been waiting for you."

Something about the old man was familiar. "Do I know you?" Graham asked.

"In a way." The man moved closer. His face was void of emotion. Pale blue eyes watched Graham intently, as if he was trying to decipher Graham's thoughts.

The man stopped less than a foot from Graham. "Don't be afraid."

"Who are you? What do you want?"

"It's a dangerous thing to ask too many questions." The man smiled, and a scorpion slipped between his teeth. It rested on his lip a moment, its tail quivering, and then sprang toward Graham's face.

Graham turned and ran. Branches slapped against his face as he cut through the jungle.

"Wait!" the man cried.

Graham's feet tangled in a web of thick vines. Before he could regain his balance, Graham fell heavily to the ground. A mouthful of dirt slid down his throat. He could feel bugs and worms squirm helplessly toward his stomach. As Graham spat out the remaining grit, his hands worked hurriedly to unravel the vines.

The rained face appeared above him. "Why did you run from me, Graham? I don't want to hurt you. I want to make you an offer."

Graham struggled free and sprang from the ground. As he pushed through the dense foliage once again, his arms were soon bloodied by the stinging branches. On his left, an animal roared. Graham wondered if it was the panther that had attacked him in his dream the night before.

Dream logic muddled Graham's thoughts. How could it be a dream if he knew he was dreaming? Besides, it seemed too real to be a dream—the smell of the rich jungle life, the vibrant colors, the branches painfully scratching his skin, the fear that propelled him from the old man.



Glancing back, Graham could see no sign that he was being followed. The air inside his lungs was hot and painful. Graham leaned against a moss-freckled tree to catch his breath.

First thing to do when I wake up, Graham thought, is join a gym.

"It won't do any good to run from me." The air in Graham's lungs iced over as he looked up. The old man sat on a branch above Graham's head. His legs swung back and forth like a child sitting on a park bench enjoying a snow cone. "Once you got the tattoo, you sealed your fate."

Graham tried to look away, but the old man's eyes were like two opaque crystal balls that teased Graham with information. "You'll be part of a ritual many hundreds of years old," the pale irises told him. "An ancient soul passing from one body to the next though a tattoo design."

The icy feeling in Graham's lungs spread, numbing his arms and legs.

"I've seen the world through many eyes. Next will be yours."

"No!" Graham cried, tearing his gaze away. It felt as if someone had stripped off the top layer of his corneas, but the communication link was severed. Graham sprinted away.

He ran until he thought his lungs would burst. As the jungle buzzed around him, Graham bent over, gasping for breath. Sweat poured off his forehead like a salty waterfall.

"Graham," someone whispered.

Graham looked up. A bulky stomach protruded from a nearby tree.

"Pop? What are you doing here?"

"Shhhh. Come here. I'll hide you."

As Graham moved forward, time shifted back. He was eight years old. "I'm scared, Pop."

"It's okay, Graham. I'll protect you." Pop enfolded Graham in his massive arms. Graham could feel the eagle and the mermaid pressing against his back. Their touch was comforting. "Everything will be fine," Pop cooed.

"He's trying to kill me," Graham wailed, burying his face in the sweet softness of Pop's t-shirt.

"Shhhh. He's not a bad man, Graham. You're very lucky to be chosen."

"Chosen?"

Pop's double chin rested against Graham's forehead. Fat fingers stroked his blonde hair. "To be the next member of the cycle."

"But I don't want to be a member of the cycle." Graham's voice sing-songed toward a sulk.

Sure you do. It means you'll carry a piece of history inside you. And part of you will carry on in the future. It's your shot at immortality. You'd be a fool to pass up the opportunity just because you're afraid."

Graham's young mind was confused. Maybe it wasn't so bad after all. Maybe he was just being a scaredy-cat. Immortal. Like Superman, or the gods in the mythology book his mother used to read him before bed. Pop said he'd be a fool to pass it up. And no one called Graham Carter a fool.

Graham pulled back and looked at Pop. "You really think I should do it?"

"I really think so," Pop said. Eyes of white marble rotated in their sockets. Suddenly Graham realized why the raisin-faced man looked so familiar. He and Pop had the same color eyes.

Pop smiled. The tip of a scorpion's tail showed between his teeth.

Graham screamed, wrenching himself out of Pop's grip. He crashed through the trees blindly, paying no attention to direction.

The trees ended abruptly, and Graham felt air beneath his feet. He had reached the edge of his dream jungle. As he somersaulted down, the colors around him merged, darkened, and then turned to black.

Graham cried out as his body jerked awake. The bed felt like a fish pond. He looked quickly around the room. No haunting eyes peered back

from a raisin face, no animals crouched in the corner waiting to attack. For the first time since Dolores left, Graham was relieved at the silence.

"It was only a dream," he murmured.

Graham made his way to the bathroom. Holding up the small mirror, he looked at his tattoo. The image still vibrated across his skin, but somehow the colors didn't seem as bright, as if the tattoo had gone through the washing machine a few times.

Six cups of fiercely strong coffee did little to revive Graham. He stumbled thought the morning, feeling like he had run a marathon the night before and then celebrated with a few dozen shots of tequila. At noon his face hovered over the lunch room table like a helicopter looking for a good place to land.

"You can't escape from me, Graham."

Graham jumped and looked around. The buzz of lunchroom conversation had lulled him to sleep.

"Did you say something?" Graham asked the two women sitting at the end of the table. They looked over and shook their heads apologetically.

Graham took a bite of his ham sandwich. It tasted like dirt. He could feel the bugs from his dream again, slithering down his throat.

"Uhhh!" Graham yelled, spitting the mouthful into his napkin. The women at the end of the table eyed him suspiciously. Graham quickly gathered up his food and dumped it in the trash on his way out of the lunchroom.

"You have no choice. You're already part of the cycle." The voice in Graham's head, deep and clear. He gasped, sitting up in his chair. This time he had nodded off at his desk.

"Looks like you had a rough night," the truck driver said as he passed Graham the papers to sign.

"Yeah. You could say that." Graham blinked his eyes into focus and

scrawled his initials on the bottom of the page.

"The transition will be complete once the tattoo fades."

Graham felt a chill settle over his chest. "What did you say?"

"I said the order will be complete once they finish loading the lemons. I want to get an early start over the grapevine before the Friday traffic gets bad," the driver said.

"Oh. Sure," Graham answered. "Have a good one."

"You too. And get some sleep this weekend. Looks like you need it."

"That's exactly what I *don't* need," Graham mumbled as he watched the driver return to his truck.

Graham dragged himself through the front door that night. The desire to sleep had only become more powerful and urgent as the afternoon wore on. Now the only thing that kept him vertical was his fear that the old man would return.

He no longer believed it was just a dream. But what bothered Graham more than the old man's chilling offer was that Pop had been a part of it all along. His childhood hero had tricked Graham into getting the tattoo and then tricked him again into believing the old man meant no harm. He'd be a fool to pass up a chance at immortality, Pop had said. But Graham knew better. He'd be a bigger fool to believe it could be so easy. Everything had a price, it was just a matter of reading the small print in the bottom corner. And whatever that price might be, it was too high. Graham preferred his boring mortality, even if it meant to keep it he'd never sleep again.

Graham cranked the television volume as high as it would go. While he waited for a pot of double strength coffee to brew, Graham looked at his tattoo in the bathroom mirror. This time there was no doubt; the colors had faded to pale washes.

The old man's words ricocheted in Graham's head: "The transition will be complete once the tattoo fades."

Goosebumps marched across Graham's arms. Suddenly he knew why Pop couldn't show him the tattoo on his back; it had faded after Pop left Bangkok. Graham's trembling hands dropped the mirror. It broke in a dozen jagged pieces.

As the afternoon sun pierced through the blinds in horizontal bands, the football game started. Graham's eyes were numb to the action on the screen. With the help of several gallons of coffee, he had managed to stay awake through the night and morning. Now his brain felt like lukewarm oatmeal.

The referee's whistles shrieked in his head. Graham's eardrums pounded painfully.

"I've been patient long enough, Graham. It's time."

As Graham watched, thick foliage sprouted from the Astroturf. "No," Graham mumbled. It was an effort to move his lips.

"You won't feel a thing. It's completely painless. All you have to decide is what you want to trade for. You can become anything in the jungle—an iguana, a lion, a tropical flower. Pop chose a panther. I might even be able to arrange something special for you, Graham. How about a mermaid?"

Graham smiled as thoughts of his adolescent mermaid drifted by. She was so beautiful, so innocent, so eager to please.

"Come back to me Graham," she called through the Astroturf trees. Her voice was gentle and inviting. "I miss you."

"I miss you, too." His head was too heavy to hold up any longer. The mermaid beckoned, and Graham closed his eyes.

The priest's words rose above the fog, praising Pop's virtues with tired clichés. He was well-loved by young and old alike. An upstanding member of the community. He'll be greatly missed. Graham smiled.

Betty stood near the priest. Graham knew there were no tears beneath her black veil; Betty was a real trooper. He was proud of her.

The ceremony ended, and the knot of people broke up. They'd move on to Betty's house to gorge themselves on roast beef sandwiches and potato salad and drums of fancily named ice cream. Graham wouldn't be joining them.

As he returned to his car, Graham's back began to itch. The tattoo had disappeared completely, just as it had from Pop's back, and the Thai man before him, and a carnival barker before him, back farther than he could remember.

Graham slid into his car and glanced at the book of tattoos on the passenger seat. It was the only thing he was taking with him. Dolores could have the rest, if she wanted it.

He thought he'd drive down to Baja. A person could make a pretty good living selling trinkets to the tourists, maybe do a little tattooing on the side.

Graham waited until the cemetery emptied before he started the car. As he drove out of town, his pale eyes glowed behind the dark glasses. □

**R**inglets of Tule fog drifted playfully around the tombstones. Graham stood behind the large knot of people that crowded the grave. Although the morning sky was overcast, he wore dark glasses.

**Barbara J. Petoskey**

**WASHING THE CAR IN LATE OCTOBER**

Today, after last week's startling snow,  
May is resurrected on Halloween's porch,  
and I'm driven to lug my bucket  
of soft house water out.

"Does it ever get warm in Michigan?"  
a Dallas acquaintance once asked.  
Yes, the state sweats.  
But in winter its great mitten  
can palm the sun for days,  
only to flash it magically  
like a quarter plucked  
from behind a thrilled child's ear.  
My father-in-law once mowed on Christmas Day,  
just so he could say he did.

"Why can't it be so mild  
all year?" my loved one asks.  
"Because then this would be California  
and we couldn't afford to live here."  
Or be moved to scrub  
in homage to the god of warm.

If it would appease the powers,  
I'd hang the laundry too.

**Steve Rasnic Tem**

**LIPS**

These are the signposts  
of the mouth, heralds  
of appetite, of passage  
from me to you,  
of love. Bitten  
or painted or pursed,  
these abused gates  
between realms of inner  
and outer guard a face  
far too open  
for comfort. Lips know  
the cautious smile, for lips  
know what goes in and  
what comes out, so often, stays  
irrevocable.

# INCURSION

Mike Lubow

**A**raven is riding afternoon thermals on ancient, splayed wings high above a peaceful pocket of Appalachian landscape, and she's keeping the distant interstate in view (a good spot for road-killed snacks), when her attention is drawn to a lone car leaving the highway at speed, entering her territory, now moving upon a narrow country road below her.

The car is compactly built, glossy black, and the raven finds it interesting, perhaps because it is somewhat raven-like. Perhaps because it is unnaturally quiet, unnaturally clean. The car looks out of place out here.

In her experience, and in the shared experience of those who've flown before she was born, there is precedent for out of place things creating the unexpected. This is encouraging. As all ravens know, the unexpected often leads to something that can be eaten.

**J**oshua, with those big hands and feet, those unnecessary shoulders—the shoulders of a driving fullback, Larry Csonka shoulders—and those cramped leg, legs that when unfurled platform his six-four frame, towering over the skull-capped heads in temple from age fifteen on... Joshua with all his bigness doesn't feel comfortable driving the agency's lowlung Infiniti.

The Japanese car is simply too

small. Prissily shiny. Confoundedly international, radiating precisely the wrong values out here in open country where real men, big men like him, hang loose and drive rumbling American-made pickups.

And Joshua in a new business suit! Itchy in the leg as dress clothes have always been for him. Stylish, perhaps, but depressingly formal. Still, it's the uniform of advertising's elite account executive branch. And he's had to wear such dress for years, even when, as on this day, he traverses into casual landscape.

He's driving alone between one urban stronghold, the home base of international ad culture (his office actually being on Madison Avenue itself), to the less cosmopolitan but drearily urban stronghold of his client, the soap giant of Cincinnati, Ohio.

**H**e's taking the company car on this long day's drive because of a sudden desire to get into the open country he'd liked as a boy, spending summers at an uncle's struggling overnight camp in the relative wilderness of upstate New York, struck by the comfort of trees, meadows, open skies.

He'd started out at four in the morning with an ETA of four that afternoon and is now surprisingly ahead of schedule. So much so that, on impulse, he twists the foreign car off the interstate (thinking that the overused road is merely a strand of civilization laid across wild land, not truly wild

itself) onto a back road, a two-laner, one of the map's blue highways, an inconsequential vein heading nowhere, into the real America.

So now, in early afternoon, Joshua in trendy tie and power suit, pulls the company car into an aged and run-down gas station on this unmarked Appalachian crossroad in the thick of cicada buzz and alfalfa smell. He opens the door, unfolds himself, Gucci loafers crunching gravel and hay seeds, and stretches his arms out and up, towering easily above the car and well above the crank-style gas pump.

The sun, unfettered by smog, shines with disarming frankness. The air feels organic, elemental. Beyond the aural trivia of insects and distant dogbark, beyond the echo in Joshua's mind of a bell ringing inside the building in response to his driving over the battered signal cord, beyond these there hangs a pure silence, and it's bigger than anything, even Joshua.

*Wouldn't mind living out here*, he thinks. In touch with the real world again. But he knows this sadly sweet country remains foreign territory, held by, squatted upon by, a people of whom Joshua is definitely not one.

There is the recollection of long-ago summer camp days, strongly with him now. Joshua had drifted about, off-camp most of the time, innocently affecting a drawl, talking the way the rawboned locals had talked. He'd needlessly squinted into the distance much of the time, and had even taken to munching straw, easy about the manure on his shoes.

He'd wanted to be feral as farm-boys were, wanted freckly country girls—so blonde, always so blonde—to find him attractive, although, big as he was he'd never had a real fight, couldn't jump fences gracefully, and wouldn't, out of some inexplicable reluctance, kill frogs or birds.

The door to the gas station opens with a creak, breaking the silence. A young man comes out, squinting, his eyes slits. He's beefy, ruggedly rural,

becapped (the universal country boy uniform, Joshua thinks, and no less rigidly conformed to than Joshua's own corporate one) with dirty blondish hair hanging to shoulder length. It was as though the man had been adroitly cast by one of Joshua's Mad-Ave directors to play the redneck, and Joshua checks to see if there's a straw in the man's mouth.

Jick approaches slowly, as if reluctant to be bothered, waddling in work boots, his gut and backmeat too big for the waistline of his jeans. Joshua knows it's Jick because the man's shirt says "Jick" in a little oval over the left breast pocket. Joshua thinks, Jick? Really? Not Jack or Jock, but Jick. Jick the Hick. And Joshua flashes on the Beverly Hillbillies; what was the guy's name? Jeb? Jed? Where do these people get their names?

"Hepya?" Jick says, squinting extravagantly.

"Could use some gas, I guess." And Joshua is immediately resentful for having lapsed again into somewhat of a drawl, thinking, good thing I didn't say, "I reckon." This hot-shot VP MBA in DDB's Infiniti. *Why not simple speak honestly, like the educated man you are?*

Jick shrugs, a gesture utterly beyond Joshua's understanding in this context, and begins to dispense gas. Joshua leans against the car, watching numbers flip with a clink inside the old pump. Jick just squints in silence, looking into the distance, up the two-lane, which is empty and quiet, watching nothing at all, watching it, Joshua thinks, with pointed and pointless purpose.

Affixed to the pump is a hand-printed sign, a chunk of battered plywood held in place by rusted wire. It reads WE DON'T EXCEPT CREDIT CARDS.

Joshua's Infiniti belches, a proper Asian belch, and the nozzle pops shut. Enough gas. Yet Jick, squinting at the pump, squeezes off a few cents more, trying as all pumpmen do, to end up on a round number. A small overflow

runs from the opening down the side of the Infiniti, the tang of raw gas sharp in Joshua's nose.

"Twenty," he says to Joshua.

Joshua unfolds two tens from the three hundred in bills he always carries, then hesitates and repockets them.

He smiles down at the man. "y'know, friend," he draws again, going with the bumpkin accent all the way now, "this here sign says I could use a credit card, I wanted to."

Jick squints up at Joshua, shaking his head, pointing at the sign. Joshua sees the fair stubble on the man's jaw. "Look cheer," Jick says.

Look cheer? The upstate boys so many summers ago had talked that way, saying cheer instead of here, chair instead of there, idn't instead of isn't when they weren't just saying ain't.

"Look cheer?" Joshua says. "You mean, like the laundry detergent? Cheer? I've done their ads, you know. What about Cheer?"

Jick sighs, then raises his voice. "Sign says we won't except 'em. No credit cards."

"No, no, no." Joshua, his voice equally loud now. "See, the sign says I *could* pay with a credit card, and that's what I want to do. Which one do you prefer? I got 'em all. Visa? Mastercard? American Express?"

Jick, reddening, looks at the ground as though something there in the gravel might tell him what to do and Joshua thinks, why am I doing this? He sees the man in getting agitated, and he knows that such types often have hair-trigger tempers, but he can't stop.

"Look, Jick—that really your name? Not Jack or something? Perhaps misspelled..." And instead of faking a drawl now, Joshua notices a hint of snobbish Brit-style upper crust working its way into his voice, and in some backroom of his mind a part of him is observing and smiling, especially liking the new accent.

"See, the way you've spelled your message," and he points a big finger

it, "you've said to all the world that you don't except or *exclude* credit cards. Might have been inadvertent. Perhaps you meant to say you don't AC-cept them. But, sir, your sign invites me to use my credit cards. Which will it be?"

Jick squints up at Joshua, his small eyes shining dark and hard, meeting Joshua's eyes head to head. There's not a sound. That stare, that challenge, recalling summercamp redneck bullies, the stare that Joshua had always been first to break off before it led to trouble. This time he holds up his end.

And Joshua thinks, this nitwit doesn't get it. Even after it's explained to him, he doesn't, *can't* get it. So much, he can't get.

Jick pushes Joshua roughly aside, some real quickness there, suggesting clearly the energy of anger, and he reaches in through the open window, pulling the keys from the car's ignition. Holding them tightly in his fist, he goes around the front of the car and up the sloping drive into the gas station.

Joshua knows it's gotten out of hand, gone too far, and he'd been about to end it, to give Jick the two tens and get rolling. But then, this. This incursion upon *his* own territory—borrowed and disliked corporate territory perhaps, but his. The confiscating of keys, an act akin to actual car theft itself, committed virtually in his face. Righteous anger pushes past impatience, annoyance, intolerance—old-fashioned made in the USA bigotry—all the things that caused him to provoke the man, and his anger is big, immediate, mindless.

"Hey!" he yells, hoarse from a tightening of neck cords, but loud, no longer sounding slightly British, purely New York.

"Hey" is a dumb word, seemingly inarticulate for a man like Joshua, but the way it comes out of him, exploding the stillness of the country afternoon, it speaks volumes, causing Jick to run the last few steps into the building and slam the door behind him.



Joshua follows, his soles slipping on the stones, dust rising up, graying his black socks, his neatly creased black suit pants, and he's feeling, wordlessly feeling, *I'm bigger than he is!*

Jick is standing behind an old table that serves as a desk, cluttered with soft drink bottles that no one in New York has seen since the forties. There's a faded Confederate flag hanging, sagging, along one wall. Below it is a deer's head, gray, defeated, plastic eyes dull, antlers dust-covered.

On a tall file cabinet to Joshua's left stands a stuffed bobcat, its coat as dusty as the deer's, eyes as lifeless, its snarl ridiculous with taxidermist's pathetic plastic teeth. A peeling old bumper sticker on the wall behind the bobcat shows an American flag and the words "Love it or Leave it."

Joshua turns to Jick. He's aware of another mounted deer's head off to the side, a girlie calendar showing a girlie who must be a drooping granny by now, a soda bottle rack, junk and dust.

Jick is holding an old black telephone receiver in one hand, on talking, as though waiting for someone to come on the line. In his other hand he holds a small rifle, tilted up, its wood grip resting against the far ledge of the table, the stock against his thigh, the little black eye of it on a line with Joshua's chest.

Joshua has seen .22s before. During summercamp days the local boys had them. Poor as they were, they always had guns. *Their meanness just outweighs their poorness*, was the way Joshua had looked at it. They used the little rifles to shoot squirrels out of trees. Once Joshua saw a twelve-year-old nail a shining redheaded woodpecker to the side of a tree, literally, the bullet hitting the bird's insubstantial body square in the middle of its back and on exiting, putting chest feathers into the bark, pinning the bird, wings spread, like a butterfly in a museum.

Joshua has seen enough of .22s and the insufferable dummies who enjoy

shooting things with them. And besides, he's bigger than the rube behind the table, bigger than the gun, too.

(People who work for ad agencies are believed to be sensitive, urban types. Mentally agile if amusingly neurotic. Trend-conscious, thoughtful, indoorsy, ultimately talkers not doers. Like most generalities, this is generally true. But there are exceptions. Joshua, although years ago found unfit to run with feral farmkids, earned his present position near the top of his company by having learned to be occasionally ruthless, spontaneous, insensitive, frankly a little dangerous.)

At a moment when most city slicker white collars would sensibly capitulate and simply offer cash and apologies — anything to get clear of a gunsight-Joshua lets his anger do the talking.

"My keys. Now!"

And he walks into, through, above and beyond the line of fire. "And put down the phone. I'll give you the twenty!"

But when Jick, who hasn't made the connection yet anyway, goes to recradle the phone, Joshua grabs the barrel of the rifle as though it's a handle on all that's wrong — had ever been wrong — with this lovely rural world, and pulls it with full strength cleanly out of Jick's grasp, Jick now too dumb and dumbstruck to resist.

And both of them are too caught up in the speed and size of the moment to react to the small, wicked snap of a single cartridge going off, the trigger innocently being pulled against Jick's finger as it rudely passes through his hand.

The little bullet bores through Joshua's good wool suit pants just below the crotch, narrowly missing the bunched genitals there, piercing soft flesh of inner thigh, nicking the femoral artery. Its sting doesn't cause enough pain to debilitate, but just makes Joshua madder.

He swings the rifle by its barrel, ignoring the sudden heat against his

palm, swings it around, arcing it back until it can go no further, then he begins to bring it down, club-like, Joshua towering over the frozen Jick, the shot ringing in both their ears.

(Maybe the stuffed bobcat is losing its vacant expression, artificial eyeballs shining through the dust—although there's no one to notice this, except perhaps the two mounted deer, but maybe they're busy watching Joshua as though this is what they've been waiting for, their heads poking through the wall like that for years, waiting.)

Joshua, punctured and bleeding, thigh on fire, pissed off beyond containment about misspelled words, Confederate flag-displaying bigots, names like Jick, *not Jack, Jock or Jacques, even*—which would be silly, but in a different way, about stuffed animals which were really just insensitively displayed corpses, about people with dead and deadly minds, in so potentially alive and sweet-smelling a place as rural America... Joshua, the biggest guy on Madison Avenue aims the stock end of the .22 at Jick's becaped skull and brings it down with all his strength.

Jick, still dumbfounded at having fired point blank like that, just stands there about to have his head bisected from crown to frown, but Joshua changes aim and sensibly bashes the phone instead.

It isn't that Joshua has anything against the foreign looking old phones of Appalachia, or even that on some level he realizes an upcoming need to eliminate Jick's ability to call authorities while Joshua drives away. This act, which at the same time cracks the rifle, its stock flying end over end like a busted ball bat amid telephone bits and broken bottles, is simply the result of Joshua's own hard-wired humanity, an innate inability to brain a fellow creature, even when he thinks he wants to.

The two men stand, a ringing in their ears, a burnt chemical smell of gunpowder in the air. Jick's eyes flick

downward, toward Joshua's feet where blood is pooling on the floor. He shrugs and takes the keys to Joshua's Infiniti from his pocket. He looks as though he might say something, and Joshua, blood pressure dropping now, thinks he'll hear, "Sorry mister, didn't mean to shoot you." Or maybe, "You okay? Want me to get some help?"

Jick simply squints. He tosses the keys on the desk and says, "Better git."

Joshua, light-headed, lets good sense take him firmly by the elbow now and lead him, keys in hand, *something of a victory in that alone, the retrieval of keys*, out of the dusty room, into the sunshine, the elemental farmland smell and into his car.

The seat is saturated with wetness now, but no matter, he's on his way, tanked up for free after all, and feeling pretty good actually, as though he's had a couple of drinks. Surprising, all the blood, because there's hardly any pain now.

And that part of Joshua's mind that mercifully remains detached, lucid, even when he's drunk or damaged, begins to worry that perhaps the wound is more serious than expected, and suggests that Joshua get off the backroad, onto the civilized interstate with its oases, as soon as possible.

So Joshua accelerates and the black car moves easily through and beyond the legal limit, coming to life now, as though enjoying urgency, a scent of danger.

A mile up the road, all unfamiliar landscape, and Joshua suddenly realizes he's been heading in the wrong direction, that the interstate is down, not up. With a small but growing sense of panic, Joshua spins the car around on the pebbly shoulder and U-turns, heading back to where he should have been in the first place.

*Get to the interstate— you're bleeding to death!* The thought chills him with its simple imperative, both emotionally and literally. He begins to shiver and pushes the heater switch on with clumsy fingers, pushing the gas pedal

all the way to the floor at the same time, swooning now at the stupidity that caused him to be in this situation.

It's simple. *Can't make it to the interstate, he thinks. Dizzy. His peripheral vision graying. I'll go to the gas station. The guy'll have to get help. We'll put a tourniquet on. Then a doctor. Shit, his phone's broke. But still....*

The car speeds off the two-lane as it tops a rise at one hundred and forty KPH according to the bilingual speedometer, and up ahead now in the blurry distance is the gas station. And then Joshua's looking at the visor, at the stitching on the leatherette fabric that lines the car's plush ceiling. *Nice leather...*

And as Joshua's blood fails his mind, the car, with that big foot jammed heavily onto the pedal, points in the right direction and tears through roadside weeds. Its cutglass headlights sparkle in the lowering sun, and something essentially Japanese is there in its nature now, coming forward, a racial memory in the metal, perhaps, of honorable suicide missions, its pilot no longer steering but powering it nevertheless, and it surges, bouncing, roaring off the road shoulder, up the driveway, right over the exploding old pump, a missile now, wheels spraying the fire of burning gasoline, lighting the tiretracks behind it, and into the old gas station, exploding it, sending timbers and glass, a man's cap, a spray of blood, a patch of bobcat fur, outward in a blast of smoke and noise and dirt.

**T**he old raven on afternoon updrafts in the low-rolling Appalachians watches with interest as black smoke rises off the burning gas station.

*A wingtip flick, and she wheels in for a closer look, perhaps to see if there will be anything to eat as a result of this break in pastoral monotony.*

*She's responding to a memory passed down to her from those who've flown before, in the way of her kind. The genetic*

*memory is distant but promising, of black columns of smoke rising in the distance over these ancestral rolling hills.*

*Wasn't more than a hundred and thirty years ago, barely three generations of ravens, when this countryside often saw such black smoke. And at dawn, the bodies of so many for the picking. ☐*

**Charles A. Payne**  
**MY IMMORTAL ATOMS**

Since life began, winds have scattered elements  
Of dead creatures over all the lands of Earth.  
The animals that live today contain  
A few atoms from each form of life that ever existed.

I trace my ancestry back to the first  
Single-cell organism that found life in Earth's ancient seas,  
And to all creatures that passed along their  
Atoms for three and a half billion years.

Some of the atoms in my body once rested  
In a California sequoia,  
A Mayan warrior's battle club,  
An African gazelle, and a Roman emperor.

One hydrogen atom in my heart  
Came from a dancing water molecule that had  
Washed the shores of Gondwanaland, and another had been  
Part of the pulsing breast of a laughing gull.

A few oxygen atoms in my blood  
Were once part of a meteorite  
That crashed into the second tier of the  
Hanging gardens of ancient Babylon.

Embedded in my bones are calcium atoms from an  
Incisor of a saber-tooth tiger and from a  
Devonian coral reef that died  
Four hundred million years ago.

Sulfur atoms in my flesh  
Came from the beard of a Neanderthal hunter,  
And from the nerve synapse of the first  
Amphibian to crawl upon the land.

From a furtive mouse-sized mammal whose  
Descendants would one day rule the planet,  
Came an atom of carbon that now  
Resides in one of my protein molecules.

The stars will slowly dim and our energy-exhausted  
Sun, with its retinue of dead planets,  
Will forever wander, frozen, with the  
Remnants of the dying universe.

But atoms of me through eternity  
Will drift with those scattered relics, and in  
Death I will at last fulfill humankind's  
Endless yearning for immortality.

**Elsie Watson McFarland**  
**PHOEBE HAD POLIO**

Six weeks after school began  
 the Gentrys moved in.  
 The yellow school bus changed its route  
 taking on six new riders.  
 Tyler, once a bustling town  
 paralyzed by the Depression,  
 now stood as two disintegrating houses.  
 Rough pine boards bolted tarpaper  
 to broken siding to thwart tropical rains.  
 Cardboard replaced window panes.

Winter arrived early that year.  
 yellow pine stoked the potbellied stove  
 and black smoke curled from the pipe  
 held by the asbestos shield  
 replacing the upper window sash.  
 Chairs squatted on the rambling porch  
 and guinea hens skittered through the yard.  
 Between two live oaks,  
 twill shirts flapped on a wire,  
 and spindly trunks of crepe myrtle  
 bowed to the harsh wind.

Ice glistened on the pump,  
 handle at full salute.  
 Phoebe tiptoed across the frosted grass,  
 arm dangling, crunching leaves beneath her feet.  
 She primed the pump and struggled  
 to pull the cool clear water  
 from the artesian well,  
 imagining the squeak and squeal  
 of the rusted joints and  
 the gush of water a morning song.

In April the bare limbs of crepe myrtle  
 sprouted prematurely,  
 showering a dust of pink and purple  
 petals on sparse hairs of grass.  
 Phoebe planted marigolds and zinnias in Dixie cups  
 to take to her fifth grade teacher.  
 In May she surprised Ole Miss Langford  
 with a basket of petunias.  
 In June the Gentrys moved on  
 to harvest northern crops.

**Maria Theresa Maggi**  
**SHIPWRECK**

1

I can't explain this impossible  
urge to swim through the dark stile  
of lives and water to draw out his body  
with a body and a life I no longer inhabit.  
I would pull its heavy sweetness onto the sand,  
that safe, deserted expanse I believe in off  
the edge of that life. I watch myself pull  
and pull and then open the mouth, and pull  
him back through with my own mouth  
open, drinking him again. I would  
give him his breathing back, broken star,  
shape of my own soul hollowed out,  
all mended, all polished in a bright blaze,  
a summer noon, a kiss that burns  
away what is making him dead.

2

This morning the earth is uncommonly damp,  
& the memory of long needed rain drips  
a slow, quiet lullaby from bare, grateful trees.  
It all happened so fast. We tried to catch him,  
and the huge tire, the back snapped like a twig.  
I know it's too late as we arrive at the vet.  
But my son says with steeled dignity  
"you can't have my kitty," and his fingers  
seal tight around the orange and white stomach.

I understand this logic; he loves it,  
so he wants to keep it, a favorite stuffed toy  
nestled in with the others who charm  
his sleep. His eyes are jacked open  
too wide to let tears out, and it's this  
that helps me know what to give him.  
We don't have a yard, so I call the friends  
who gave us the kitten. On the way over,  
I try to explain how once the body's  
in the ground we can't dig it up,  
that it won't be the Pooh Bear anymore,  
it belongs to the earth now, whether  
we give it back or not.

I expected to use the shovel myself,  
but when we get here, one of them is out in the yard  
Making the grave, half ready for work,  
his white dress shirt hanging over the mud.  
His dark threads of hair are still wet from the shower.  
He leans his weight into the shovel, and pushes.

Shock works like the rain  
 to shine each edge so hard and bright  
 that, for an instant, the polar axis  
 of time has shifted, and our bodies  
 and our lives are just casings,  
 or versions of a brightness  
 dimmed back, and kept in check.  
 In this flash, tiny chips  
 off the stone of another time  
 distinguish themselves  
 above the opened ground.

The convergence of details  
 comes at me like a brush fire.  
 I feel myself here  
 and live myself there  
 in that fiery wish  
 to have him back.  
 I see me at the market,  
 sealed in this flame, a ghost  
 fingering vegetables grown  
 away from the sun: fists  
 of small onions the color  
 of bone dug up for a stew  
 when the world was flat.  
 I wear a wool cape with a hood.  
 My basket smells like dirt;  
 it digs into my hip. When will  
 I be done with this shopping?  
 I am shopping forever,  
 pining for a glimpse of  
 my lost sailor's corpse  
 mute and thirsty as leaves.

3

I remember how a woman who read my palm  
 had lifted the back of my open hand  
 like it was not a hand,  
 but something in a museum  
 beneath a heavy glass case,  
 with dates on a stiff white index card.  
 To her, my hand was a rare funeral urn,  
 the original glaze shattered by centuries  
 into a blooming meadow of tiny x's  
 coding how all the sorrows from other lives  
 buried their seeds in this one, waiting,  
 until each cycle is willing to flower.

If this time he's alive to witness our morning,  
swinging the shovel for a tiny kitten's grave,  
then is death only another undiscovered season?  
My son's head is a dizzy star, nodding and bobbing.  
As we hang over this gracious hole in the earth,  
our lives twist back and reinvent themselves again;  
the kiss of indestructible desire I once longed to give  
surprises me with its powers of transformation,  
wakening me to this chance to my grief  
and return to willing earth a soft scrap of joy.

**Elsie Watson McFarland**  
**VOYEURS**

In February, outside  
in our front yard,  
fat robins pierce  
plump mountain ash berries,  
stand on toothpick legs,  
heads bobbing, up  
and down, up  
and down,  
to repeat the synthetic  
motions of mechanical birds.

Orange breasts flit from trees  
to sidewalk and dot snow  
smeared with dirt and grime,  
oil exhausted from passing  
vehicles. We watch  
as startled by sudden motion  
you flee, and smashed  
from fermented berries,  
you fly  
into our glass windows.



## SHORT STORY

## PROPER GRIEF

Deborah Cuthbert

**D**o I have to spend all day over there?" Jack Clinton asked. "It's expected," his mother said. Her shoulders moved rhythmically as she stirred the cake batter. "It's a way of paying our respects."

"But Aunt Mattie isn't there anymore. Couldn't I just put in an appearance at the funeral home this evening?"

Emma Clinton gasped, dropped her spoon into the cake batter and turned around, clutching her heart. "I can't believe I've reared a child who would talk this way. Aunt Mattie's death was a pure tragedy, snatched away like she was with no warning. The least you can do is mourn her properly."

Jack turned to his father for help, but Don stuck his pipe between his teeth and pulled the newspaper up in front of his face. He ventured another look at Emma, but she was once again immersed in a frenzy of cooking. Sighing, he headed for his room. Sometimes, his parents were more of a burden than a fifteen year old could bear.

Any death was sad, but to call Aunt Mattie's passing tragic, bordered on the absurd. She was ninety-eight years old, and she'd been spry mentally and physically until this morning when she'd dropped dead walking to the bathroom. Wasn't that the way to go?

Maybe his mother would have rather had poor Aunt Mattie succumb to a painful lingering illness so she could have had time for a proper farewell.

He knew better. Emma Clinton was simply struggling with her grief, the same way he was. He loved Aunt Mattie as much as anyone, more probably. She may have been encased in an old body, but her spirit had been fresh and young. She was fun and full of mischief right up until the day she died, and he was going to miss her, but he didn't relish going over to that house and having his every word and deed scrutinized by friends and relatives. Grief should be a private thing.

Discretion won, however, and he donned a shirt and tie and went back to the kitchen.

"I'm glad to see you've come to your senses," Emma said. "We don't need any more turmoil."

Jack nodded, took a seat across from his father and tried to steel himself for the ordeal to come. Being fifteen was tough, even on good days, but it was downright impossible when your favorite person had died.

**A**unt Mattie's house was almost empty when the Clintons arrived. Emma hurried to the kitchen to get her food set out before the guests began coming in. Don shook hands with Uncle Bob, murmured something about Aunt Mattie, then stationed himself on the couch. He and Bob began talking quietly and Jack felt very much alone.

With nothing better to do, he went to the back parlor. It had been Aunt Mattie's favorite room and he thought he might find some comfort amid her most precious possessions. He ran his hand over the worn Bible that sat on the table next to her easy chair, then moved to the window box where an array of green plants caught the morning sun. He fingered a delicate leaf and his eyes blurred with tears as a memory of Mattie sprang to his mind.

"Admirin' my plants, boy?" Mattie had said.

Embarrassed that he'd been caught, Jack stepped away. "Just looking out the window."

"It ain't a sin to like plants."

"It's sissy," Jack said.

"You callin' God a sissy, boy?"

"No, ma'am."

"Yes, you are. He liked plants so much, he filled the whole Earth with them. Then he made people. We were kind of an afterthought. Remember that. It'll keep you from gettin' too high and mighty." Then she grinned and hugged him, making everything all right.

Jack backed away from the window and sat in Mattie's chair. Lifting a heart-shaped rock from the table, he closed his eyes and let the memory of her voice wash over him again.

"What bee's in your britches, boy?"

"Everybody has gone to summer camp but me. Daddy says we can't afford a fancy camp, but he and Mama are off on a trip to the Ozarks. They can afford that."

Aunt Mattie gave him her most appealing smile. "And you're stuck her with only an old woman for company. I'll be amazed if you can survive it."

"That's not it. I like you. It's just that I'll be missing all the fun."

"We can make our own fun, Jack."

He wondered how to tell her, without hurting her feelings, that fun for a twelve-year-old was different from fun for someone her age. After ponder-

ing the question, he could think of no polite way to do it, so he asked her what kind of fun she meant.

"How about a swim?"

"The pool's closed."

"The creek's open," she said.

Mattie instructed him to change into his suit and meet her on the front porch. When he got there, she was waiting for him holding a basket of food in one hand and a blanket in the other. "How did you have time to fix a picnic?"

"It's just some cold chicken to gnaw on and a jug of lemonade. Swimming works up an appetite."

Jack grinned and skipped down the steps. He should have known that Aunt Mattie would turn a simple trip to the creek into an event.

At the creek, he pulled off his pants and waded in. The cold water jolted him, but he ignored the shivers that spread through his body and looked for a spot deep enough to allow swimming.

Aunt Mattie removed the lemonade from the basket and set it in the stream to cool. "The water's right brisk."

"Feels good once you're in," Jack said.

"I might as well join you."

Jack watched in surprise as Mattie shucked her print dress and stepped into the water wearing her cotton camisole and flowered bloomers. The cold water didn't seem to phase her as she ducked her head under and swam toward him.

"Should you be doing this? You might catch cold or have a heart attack."

"Gracious sakes alive, boy, I'm ninety-five years old. I'm probably supposed to have a heart attack and die, but I'm not going to spend my time frettin' about it. At my age, you take your pleasure where you can."

"I just don't want to get into trouble with Grandma. She'd have a fit if she saw you now."

Delicious laughter floated from Aunt Mattie's lips. "My dear niece is simply jealous. She's lived her life in fear of one thing or another and she can't stand it that I take life as it comes. I enjoy the good and hang on until the bad is over. I don't wait for either one."

They swam until Jack's stomach began to complain, then dried off and had their picnic. While Mattie packed away the leftovers, Jack scoured the edge of the creek looking for unusual rocks. Catching a glimpse of a heart-shaped one, he snatched it out of the water. He hopped up the rise and handed it to Mattie.

"How unique. It's almost a perfect heart."

"I want you to have it," he said timidly. He was afraid she'd think him silly for being sentimental.

Mattie caressed the rock, then Jack's slender face. "I'll treasure it forever. Each time I look at it, I'll think of you."

Jack was plunged back into the present by the shouts of his young cousins. Five of them dashed into the room, flicked on the TV, then proceeded to argue over which channel to watch. Jack slipped the rock into his pocket and left the room.

The living room was now full of sad-eyed adults. They huddled in small groups, murmuring to each other, paying no attention to the young man who moved silently among them. He knew he shouldn't have come; he didn't fit in without Aunt Mattie around. He was too old for the children's room and too young to be comfortable in a room of weeping adults.

This wasn't what Aunt Mattie would have wanted anyway. She had told him so. "No sad wakes for me, boy. I'd like my friends to gather and remember the good times, the funny things. I want them to celebrate my life, not mourn it."

Jack couldn't picture this solemn group getting rowdy with wild stories of Mattie's life. They would have con-

sidered that rude. None of them would understand rejoicing because Aunt Mattie had touched their lives.

Quietly he slipped outside to the rose garden. Mattie had spent hours there, even after she gave up tending the fragrant blossoms and hired a gardener. She said that the peace provided her a glimpse of heaven and the older she got, the more she enjoyed the tranquil spot.

Inhaling the fresh scent, Jack sat on the iron bench. "I miss you already. I'm trying not to cry, but it's awful hard."

Closing his eyes, he tried to focus on the good times, but even those memories seemed to tug at his heart. It would have been easier if he had someone with which to share this terrible emptiness.

Suddenly he remembered last summer when Mattie taught him to dance. He had asked Patty Loomis to a school dance, then started getting cold feet when he realized he didn't know how to do a single dance. After blurt-ing out his problem to Aunt Mattie, he'd burst into tears.

"You dry those tears right now. There's a wealth of things to bawl about, but this ain't one of them. Any fool can learn to dance well enough to get by."

She turned on the portable radio she always took to the garden and proceeded to amaze him with her knowledge of the latest steps. A slow tune came on, and she whirled him around the garden, never wincing when he stepped on her toes.

"You're great!" he said as they sat down to rest.

"How do you think I keep from gettin' flabby, boy? I don't have the energy I once did, but I can still cut a rug if I want to."

Snapping a rosebud from a bush, she stuck it in her hair and held out her hands to him.

"Shouldn't we rest a little longer?"

"Rest when you're dead," she replied.

Her image faded and Jack wiped away his tears. He got up, plucked a perfect red rosebud, and stuck it behind his ear. Arms raised, he began to dance with an invisible partner in Mattie's honor.

"Cut that out!" Emma said, advancing toward him. "Do you want folks to think you have no respect for the dead? What's gotten into you?"

"I'm doing this for Aunt Mattie," he said, and resumed his dance.

"You need your head examined." She grabbed his shoulders and forced him to stop. "Are you trying to punish me for insisting you come here?"

"No ma'am."

"Then get that stupid flower off you ear and get cleaned up. We're going to the funeral home now. And please try to behave yourself. Death is a serious affair."

Doesn't she look natural," Grandma said.

Uncle Bob squeezed her hand. "Just like she's sleeping."

"I picked the dress myself," Emma said. "Do you think the color is flattering?"

"What do you think, son?" Don said, putting his arm around Jack.

He flinched and pulled away. She looked dead, Jack thought. Stone, cold dead. But they didn't really want to know what he thought. They wanted to hear him mimic their own words and he couldn't do that.

"Don't be afraid."

"I'm not afraid. I just don't want to stand here and gawk."

Don pulled his son into the hallway. "I don't know what's gotten into you, but I don't want you to do anything else to upset your mother."

Jack felt for the rock in his pocket and turned away. He sat outside on the steps, until his father came to get him.

"I'll walk home if that's okay."

"You really shouldn't be alone. It's times like this we should be draw-

ing closer. People mourn together, son."

"I need to do this my way, Dad."

The funeral service was long, but several people had asked to make remarks. Each told some favorite story about Mattie, praising her warmth, her kindness, or her loving spirit. When it finally ended, the family filed past the casket to say their final goodbyes. Emma Clinton glanced at the casket, gasped, then fainted dead away. A bright red rose was tucked in Mattie's hair. Jack rubbed the rock in his pocket and smiled. It may not have been the proper way to mourn his aunt, but he was doing what she told him to do, hanging on until the bad was over. □

**Paul Lindholdt**  
**FISHING**

How you came by such compassion  
I can't say.  
We are fishing in the Sawtooths,  
I toss a squawfish  
to the back to feed the gulls  
and behind my eyes  
you gather the slime in hand,  
toddle to water's edge  
to cleanse it — that scrap  
abhorred by sportsmen,  
flopping as if cast out of heaven —  
and then you liberate  
the fish so it can bite  
your father's hook once more.

**Neil C. Fitzgerald**  
**DRIVEN**

I maneuver my skiff past shaking masts  
for the wind is brisk, the waters choppy.  
Early darkness creeps across the harbor  
forcing lights on, urging me to hurry,  
to escape the storm bearing down on me.  
The sea has no patience, no compassion,  
its mounting fury, blind to man and bird,  
swallows all who tempt its certain coming.  
Listen to the gulls, they scream at the night,  
this foreboding grip that makes pilings moan,  
that makes the tenuous sandbar tremble.  
I pull harder on the oars, my hands burn,  
my heart races, I taste the bitter salt  
and like beleaguered Lot, dare not look back.

# GRAFFITI

continued from page 2

obsession, a challenge, the desperation of expression. It is one or all of the above. It is a choice we have made for our lives that needs no justification to anyone.

If you are one of those blessed (cursed) individuals who has to listen to the derisive comments of others, on a regular basis, aimed towards your literary endeavors, then take comfort in their words. (As I said, this is an insane business.) For these are your portents, your omens, your signs and revelations. Among other things needed to be a writer is *dedication*. And the more often you hear the doubts of others, the more you might be able to count yourself as a true writer. When you stop hearing such comments altogether, then you've either become such a success that the doubters eat their words in embarrassed silence – or you've stopped writing, stopped being a writer.

And to those who deliver these verbal portents and signs, maybe you could tell me how you could be reading this text if it weren't for those of us who write such?

Got no answer? I didn't think so.

Call it martyrdom if you like. Perhaps you are right. No apologies.

Many New York editors are often heard to say, "Those who keep trying are the ones who make it." But this doesn't mean that a writer's craft doesn't need to grow and improve. A friend of mine recently bought a copy of *Writer's Digest* magazine for market news and then handed it to me – without reading it – saying, "Here, keep it. There's nothing in here to interest me." I took a look at the issue and found some great articles on editing your own work. The day you feel that you "know it all" is the day you stop learning and you stop improving – you stop being a writer. Every story or poem you write should be a learning experience. All writers need to find a balance somewhere between arrogance and humility.

You need enough arrogance that taking rejection comes as naturally as eating and breathing, whether it be your manuscript rejected by an editor or your chosen profession rejected by those who think you need a *real job*. You need enough humility to remember you're never going to be perfect – there will always be something new to learn. Every famous writer in the country could wall paper their bedroom in rejection slips, but those acceptance letters will make that wallpaper fade away. And every writer who ever made it to the top hasn't stayed there long unless he kept on climbing, kept on working, kept on learning.

Keep learning, keep trying, keep submitting. That's the final piece of the puzzle. No one will ever have the chance to publish those stories or poems if they are sitting in your lower desk drawer.

And to the doubters, who think there's nothing to it all, *Thank You* for your inspiration.

And to the readers, who want to be able to turn another page, *Thank You* for your inspiration.

And to the real writers, who know the value of both of the above, where the hell is your next submission?

The editor is waiting, with what little sanity *it* has left. ☐

# GUIDELINES

## For Submissions to *FUGUE*

☐ *FUGUE* is a digest of multi-genre fiction, poetry, and non-fiction. Issues are published at the end of the Fall and Spring semesters at the University of Idaho. Each issue contains vignettes, poetry, stories and commentary chosen to satisfy a wide variety of tastes in literature. The magazine is staffed entirely by English and English Education majors — undergraduate and graduate — presently attending the University, and is funded entirely by a publishing stipend from the UI English Department, local merchant advertising, and the readership of the magazine. A single issue of *Fugue* is \$3.00 retail, USA funds.

☐ **Submissions:** Proper manuscript format and submission practices apply to all works sent to *Fugue*, without exception. Include the following on all manuscripts: name, address, phone number, *word count* (fiction) or *line count* (poetry), proper headers, title & byline. Manuscripts must be typed with one-inch margins on all sides, double-spaced (poetry may be

single-spaced), with title and page number in the upper right corner of each page. Include a #10 SASE with your submission for a response. Make a copy of the manuscript for yourself — *do not send an original manuscript!* Submissions should be delivered to: *Fugue* c/o University of Idaho, English Dept., Brink Hall Rm. 200, Moscow, Idaho 83843. Response time is usually no less than six weeks. No simultaneous or reprint submissions. You are welcome to include a copy of your submission on disk in IBM format with your manuscript, but you must include a disk mailer with appropriate return postage if you wish the disk returned upon response. Submissions without a proper SASE will not be read, considered or responded to.

☐ **Editorial Process:** Each submission is read by several staff members who make a recommendation, then pass it on to the executive editor and staff advisor for final decisions. All readings are done "blind." Staff readers will not be aware of the identity of the creator. *Fugue* is looking for a wide range of material — Mainstream, Experimental, Fantasy, Mystery/Suspense, Metafiction, Historical, Science Fiction, Magical Realism, Horror, Fantasy, Western, Cultural, Regional, Speculative, etc. *Fugue* is a showcase for all types of *entertaining* literature.

☐ **Stories:** These must be complete and concluded, with good char-



acterization and plotting. You must make the reader *feel* without resorting to standard cliché tricks. Endings should have a foundation in the plot and not simply pop out of nowhere. Experimental fiction is acceptable, but we do not cater to an elite readership—the story must be comprehensible and enjoyable for anyone. Average word count is 3000 words, but we consider any length up to 10,000. Book excerpts, chapters, and serializations will not be considered. Payment is \$5 to \$15 depending on length and content.

☐ **Novelettes:** Any story with a length of 7500 words or more. We are twice as critical in this category of literature as for any of the others, since such a piece would reduce the number of works published in an issue. The greater length must be justified by superior content. Payment is \$20.

☐ **Vignettes:** Many of today's published *short-short* stories are actually vignettes—stylishly rendered scenes/events that emphasize imagery and impression over plot—these are sometimes also referred to as "sudden fiction." A mood of "endlessness"—scene carries forward/backward beyond the text—should be maintained. This is perhaps the most difficult type of fiction to write and still maintain as engaging for the reader. Maximum word count is approximately 1000 words. Payment is \$5.

☐ **Poems:** The modern standard is "free verse," but we would like to see a wide range of other forms as well, including successful hybrids of traditional and modern formats. We consider all premise and non-premise themes without restriction, from the serious to the utterly whimsical. Payment is \$5 to \$10 depending on length and content.

☐ **Non-fiction:** We are looking for well-constructed commentary, articles, essays, reviews, etc., written in a comprehensible style aimed at readers, not at peers/writers. All articles, essays, and commentary must relate to *contemporary* works, authors,

issues, or to a generally well-known topic. Note: we are not particularly interested in works which merely establish a forum for personal socio-political views. All topics must have a relevance to the general public. The maximum word count is 1000 words, but longer works may be considered if exceptional. Payment is \$5 to \$10 depending on length and content.

☐ **Fugue Staff Submissions:** The staff is allowed to submit work for publication in the magazine. Such submissions will be read "blind," as for any submission, with readers chosen by the executive editor. No special consideration will be given to any submission by a staff member of *Fugue*. This is guaranteed by the Executive Editor.

☐ **Final Note:** If you have further questions, write to: Exec. Ed., *Fugue*, University of Idaho, English Dept., Brink Hall, Rm. 200, Moscow, Idaho 83843. Include a #10 SASE if you wish a response. All queries will be answered within two weeks. If necessary, for resolving a problem or answering a question not covered herein, you may contact the Executive or Managing Ed. locally by phone. Do not call about the status of your submission—no information concerning the status of any submission will be distributed under any circumstances, except via SASE delivered directly to the contributor after the submission has been fully reviewed by the staff.

☐ **FUGUE** was established in 1989 by Leiloni Reed, J.C. Hendee, Barb Hendee, and Prof. Ron McFarland as an outlet/forum for writers and as an instrument for students to obtain some experience with editing and publishing.

Inquiries into assisting in, and helping to support, the continuation of this project are heartily encouraged. You may address your interests care of the Executive Editor or Prof. Ron McFarland at the magazine address.





