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FUGUE

Ron Wiginton

Samuel Blair

Constance Joan

Bovier

Scott Wilson

Chris Farnsworth

Barry S. Eisenberg

Micael Eldrich

Gladys Pruitt

Charles Hood

Karen Dale

Richard Paul

Schmonsees

Michael A. Arnzen

The University Of Idaho Literary Digest

Executive Editor,
Managing Fiction Editor
Mark Coen

Managing Poetry Editor
Maria Maggi

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Staff Advisor/Copy Editor
Prof. Ron McFarland

Production/Layout
Figment Press
J.C. Hendee

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G R A F F I T I

EDITORIAL
COMMENTS
ETC.

THIS ISSUE IS the editorial debut of Mark Coen, who was an Associate Editor last spring and now suddenly arises, like a new constellation, one feels inclined to say, as Executive Editor and Managing Fiction Editor. In short, he is the guy who sees to it that the "stuff" is delivered to John Hendee, the former Executive Editor, in time for him to turn copy into text during the last week or so of the semester. (One hankers after a metaphor here: something on the order of grist for the mill, and yet how archaic that old cliché rings in these word-processing days.)

Mark Coen, one of our many "non-traditional students," is a 1982 graduate of Grangeville High School. After a year of rough-necking in the oil fields of Wyoming, panning for gold in the Yukon, and riding herd in Montana, Coen struck it rich in Vegas, but lost every cent to an exotic dancer within a week. Destitute and deeply depressed, he could think of no other solution than to go to college: desperate men will resort to desperate measures. After a lackluster year at the University of Idaho, Coen dropped out and worked as a dealer in Winne-mucca, then as a driver for The Mob. When his comical sidekick, Stan "Sidewinder"

Sisson, was gunned down before his eyes in broad daylight in the midst of the Humboldt desert, Coen felt, in his words, "The heavy hand of fate." He returned to the University of Idaho, where he has flourished as an English major (creative writing option). The prognosis is good for graduation in May of 1994.

Coen is joined by Maria Maggi, who serves as Managing poetry Editor and whose life story is too wrenchingly painful to be described in this column. Suffice it to say that she holds the MFA degree from the University of California at Irvine, has had several of her poems published in acclaimed magazines, and is a part-time lecturer in the English department at the University of Idaho.

In this issue we offer five short stories, a short essay (our first "non-fiction"), and half a dozen poems. We examined mounds of material and were surprised (dismayed?) not to have encountered more appealing poems. One contributor sent us no fewer than 27 poems! Don't do that, please. It hurts. It doesn't hurt to reject them, but it does hurt to read that many poems from anyone, when one suspects that the writer is simply abrogating his or her responsibility to choose (select? cull?). We did not manage to extract material from a visiting writer for a "Featured Writer" selection in this issue, but we will try harder next time. We have taken steps to improve our proof-reading. Any "steps" to be taken in the direction of better contents will have to be initiated by our contributors.

—Ron McFarland

SHORT STORY

DEAD LAKES

Ron Wiginton

Living in holes is easy if the reasons don't come inside with you. When something happens, no matter what it is, no matter how pure, don't even think about it. Just fill up the tank, switch on cruise control, and tell yourself it was the right thing to do, it was the right thing to do, it was the right thing to do.

I think that's what I did. I think that's what I always do. I ran to my new hole, two rows over and one blink from the last hole, because it was better than having to think about it, better than having to step over all those reasons lying on the floor. I had that hole, then I blinked, and now I have this hole, this green one with a black-tar roof, this hole on the swamp where frogs, crickets and owls scream at me in the middle of the night because they are just as scared as I am.

I found this place two days before Christmas when I was riding south, coming out of Atlanta, smoking my last cigarette, drinking the last can from a 12-pack of warm beer, and just basically cruising toward a drug-free America at ninety-fucking-miles-an-hour. My idea, if I can call it that, was to find myself in Florida, right on the goddamn

water, where I would run along the shore, run so fast and hard that I'd be just a blur, a streak of colored nothing that people might see but never appreciate.

I was on the back roads because it seemed like that was where I belonged. I had finished my last swallow of beer and was looking for a store, any store, when I saw a sign that said, "Dead Lakes—Five Miles." Maybe it was just the beer, but I laughed out loud, I guess for the first time since that redhead sat on my lap at the Pleasant Peasant and licked my nose like a puppy dog. I had this idea that the lakes were really dead, with maybe nothing there except an engraved tombstone: "There used to be a lake here, but it died." I was wondering what it would take to kill a whole lake when I saw another sign, "Jimmy's Fish Camp...Air-Conditioned," with a big arrow pointing off into the woods. I had been thinking about my Uncle Jimmy, the man who sort-of raised me, so maybe that's why I turned down that road. Maybe it was just the image of my Uncle Jimmy tip-toeing around a bunch of little tents with all these little fish relaxing beneath their little air conditioners.

But it wasn't a fish camp. It was a boat landing with about a dozen tiny green cabins sitting on the edge of this huge swamp. An oyster-shell parking lot was empty except for an

old, red pickup truck, and off to the left was a small, white-framed house with a sign that said "OFFICE" on it. And it wasn't my Uncle Jimmy. It was some old guy in overalls sitting in front of the TV, watching "Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer" while his wife sat beside him, stirring some brown stuff in a large bowl. I stood at the screen door for a long time, looking inside the little house, wondering what it might be like to live there, right on the swamp, and to be sitting in my favorite chair, watching Rudolph, with my wife sitting next to me, stirring some brown stuff in a large bowl.

I don't know exactly what it was. I didn't really have a plan, but I guess the notion of going to Florida somehow included the image of a condominium, something I could afford, with maybe a wet bar in the corner and crashing waves off the balcony. But the green cabins reminded me of the scene from "Bonnie and Clyde" where the bank robbers were staying in some cabins just before the cops came and shot them all to hell. That somehow seemed fitting for me, like maybe that was where I belonged, too. Only I never robbed anybody. I just wrote about them.

"Excuse me, are you open for business?"

The old couple turned toward me with only their heads, as if their bodies were not ready to leave poor Rudolph floating on the iceberg. Finally, the old guy gets up and walks over to stare at me through the screen door with his mouth half open, a slight curl in his top lip, like maybe I was the stranger he had been warned about all of his life. I kept my sunglasses on so he couldn't see my eyes.

"I saw your sign and I was wondering if I could rent a cabin for a day or two," I said, almost apologetically.

"It's Christmastime!" he said, doing little to disguise the contempt in his voice. At another time I might have said something like "No shit, Sherlock," but I figured he wouldn't appreciate it. Nobody ever does.

"Yes sir, I know, but are you still open for business?"

He looked over at my gray Volvo before returning his open mouth toward my blue dress pants, white shirt and red silk tie. I wondered if he liked my Ray-Bans.

"But it's Christmastime!"

I was thinking that he might be right, that I should leave the absurd for the surreal, and I started to walk away when Mrs. Fish Camp came to the door to check me out. I'm not sure what she was looking for. Maybe a sign that said I wouldn't sneak into her house and steal the stuffed catfish hanging over the kitchen sink.

"It's \$12.50 a day, you change your own sheets," she said. "We got canoes and motorboats if you want 'em, but I don't reckon you will."

I paid for two days and found myself inside the third cabin from the end, a two-room flop with bits of furniture that somebody's grandmother probably bought and cherished for fifty years before her children's children unloaded it on Fish Camp Jimmy. Two double beds of different styles took up nearly all of the small front room, leaving space only for a scrawny scratched-up table and two mismatched kitchen chairs. The back room was a combination kitchen-bathroom-shower that provided the entire place with a singular aroma, a cross between fried fish and a toilet that needed to be flushed two days ago.

A greasy window in the kitchen gave me a bent view of the parking lot and I could see the old couple still standing at their front door. I thought about making funny faces at them but instead walked back to my car and rummaged through the

trunk like I was actually looking for something. The fine line that separates curiosity from nosiness, a line I know all too well, finally got the better of them and they went back inside, leaving me to quickly retrieve my briefcase, a camera bag and the portable laptop computer that the paper gave me last year when I broke the story about a city councilman's drug problems.

I sat out on the front porch overlooking the swamp for I guess a couple of hours that evening before I figured it out that maybe what I was feeling, for the first time in a long time, was that the commitments I once used to define myself were no longer worth a pile of spit. Somebody in the DeKalb County Superior Court clerk's office was probably scared to death that I would be there the next morning to rifle through some secret files. A news editor at the paper was relaxing, certain that I would fill the 40-inch news hole in Sunday's feature section that he had already laid out for me. But none of that mattered anymore and as I sat there with mosquitoes biting me in the darkness I wondered why I ever thought any of it mattered.

But I guess that was Uncle Jimmy's fault. He raised me the best he could, I suppose, after my mother found her own sense of happiness with a Canadian who didn't like children. But if Uncle Jimmy had had a better job than ferrying tugboats across Lake Michigan maybe I never would have thought I needed an after-school job. And maybe then I never would have started selling the *Chicago Tribune* on Lake Shore Drive where the people would sometimes line up because some reporter had a big story. And maybe then I never would have been interested in seeing a newspaper movie like "All the President's Men." And maybe then I never would have read the book and started thinking that

there could be no better job than writing about crooked politicians and saving the world from corruption.

And I guess that's when it all started. The Trib eventually hired me as one of the newsroom gophers, letting me deliver memos, pour coffee and scrape jelly doughnuts off the floor. But mostly what I did was watch the reporters, watch their every move, and listen to them bicker about every asshole editor they ever met, bickering that would stop only when they got to rush out to cover a bank robbery, a double homicide, a visit by the Pope. I guess I got hooked on the idea of it all, the idea of being a Walter Cronkite with an attitude, and it wasn't very long before I won the annual *Tribune* scholarship to study journalism at Northwestern.

And when the college paper ran my first story—a little blurb about some guys who juggled bowling balls—I saw some students reading it in my chemistry class. I wasn't able to do a goddamn thing for the rest of the day except walk around campus and pretend to tie my shoes whenever I saw someone reading the paper. It was a strange feeling—like kick-starting a black motorcycle—that gave me goose bumps. On a good day, I guess it still does, but not as often.

I really didn't sleep that first night here in my swampy hideout. I think I was afraid of dreaming. I may have dozed for a minute or two, but a mosquito or a frog or a memory would bring me back and I would wipe the slobber off my chin and go back to counting the number of times I might have overlooked something in my life. It was actually kind of nice, keeping myself awake like that, because I was able to watch the sunrise for maybe the first time while still relatively sober.

I was still sitting on the porch when I heard Fish Camp Jimmy

start up his motor boat. I know he probably had grits and coffee and eggs, maybe even French toast, but the idea that he was going out on the swamp to catch his morning breakfast was just too nice, too much like real world stuff, that I had to smile with a certain kind of envy, a silent nod of respect for a man who probably never questioned his own legitimacy.

But the thought of food made me hungry and I walked over to the little house to ask Mrs. Fish Camp where I might find a restaurant.

"Well, *it is* Christmas Eve day," she said, pouring guilt over me with a heavy ladle, "so about the only thing you gonna find open will be the Piggly Wiggly. Just take the highway south to Wewa. You can't miss it."

I found the grocery store open, as promised, and I filled my shopping cart with necessities—pancake mix, toilet paper, beer—while doing my best to duck the stares of the locals cruising up and down the aisles with their babies and worn-out shoes. The cashier, a pimply-faced girl who probably had three kids and an unemployed boyfriend, was wearing a Santa Claus cap.

"Merry Christmas!" she said. I mumbled something and pretended to look through the tabloids on the counter as she bagged my groceries. "Sure gonna be a pretty day, ain't it?"

I didn't really answer her because I was wondering what it would be like to write stories about Dolly Parton's illegitimate Mongoloid children. But then I realized the cashier had stopped everything and was staring at me. A sliver of paranoia tugged on me, like maybe I had, once again, overlooked something.

"Is there something wrong?" I suggested.

"You tell me!" A happy face button on her chest bounced with every deep breath. "It's the day be-

fore Christmas but I still gotta work and be nice to everybody and everything and you don't even say good morning. What's the matter? Did you think I might bite?"

If it had been only a few days before I might have smiled that fake smile that girls always liked and said good morning or hello or fuck off or something like that. But I just stood there, thinking again about other mistakes I had made, other things I had done to piss people off. She finished bagging my stuff, slamming the beer down on top of my bread, and the noise from the crackling paper bags made me wince again and again and again. I walked, drove, raced and then slid back into my cabin where I fell upon the bed closest to the door, letting the dreams come and have their way with me.

When I woke, Christmas lights from the little house across the parking lot were blinking through my kitchen window, painting my grocery bags in shades of red, then green, then red, then green, and I sat up thinking that maybe I should call somebody. Instead I made some sausage and pancakes and sat out on the front porch, eating my dinner on a chipped plate. Somebody was singing "Silent Night" over at the little house and I thought that maybe I should just kill myself and get it over with. But I had to laugh at the idea because I would probably overlook something and not do it right, maiming myself even more than I already am.

So instead I decided to write. That's about all I know how to do, anyway, and so I sat at the scrawny table with my portable computer and wondered where to begin. Two beers later and I was still sitting there, the screen as bare as the light bulb that shone above me. I was wondering if it would be impolite to go ask Jimmy Fish Camp about the closest bar, but then I remembered

something an old geezer in Atlanta had once told me. I was a rookie police reporter, fresh out of college, and he was something of a legend in the Atlanta press corps. I was working on a story about a string of liquor store robberies but I couldn't even get the first paragraph down. I was sitting there, staring at the blank screen, when the geezer asked me, "Son, did you get any pussy last night?" I laughed and shook my head but I really wasn't in a joking mood. I was on deadline. But then he said, "And are you going to get any tonight?" I wanted to make some kind of snappy comeback, something that would make him shut his fat face, but I couldn't think of anything and so I just shrugged my shoulders. "Well then," he said, "If you didn't get laid last night, and you're not going to get laid tonight, then you don't have a goddamn thing to think about right now except this story. So quit fucking staring at me and write the mother fucker!"

I never did like the old bastard all that much. But I guess I did remember a thing or two because I found myself sitting there at the scrawny table writing about him and that pussy story. It was a start, I told myself. So I wrote about him and that reminded me of how I made my quick rise up the newsroom ladder. I had been working there for less than a year when I was assigned a series of stories about race relations inside the Metro Atlanta P.D. I worked on it for weeks before I got several black cops to trust me enough to give me some real shit on the white police chief. The next thing I knew I got some big writing award and I was on my way. At first I was the dayside court reporter, but after I won some more awards and got mentioned in a local TV piece about news hound celebrities, I was assigned City Hall, maybe the most prestigious beat in the newsroom.

The fact that I was only twenty-four frightened the hell out of some of the old hands, but I just smiled that fake smile and said please and thank you and why don't you just blow me.

I was putting all of that into my little portable when I realized that it was nearly daylight outside and I was running out of beer. I thought about the Piggly Wiggly store, but only for a second, and then I thought I might just lie down for awhile and rest. I don't know how long I had been asleep before Mrs. Fish Camp started knocking on the front door.

"Merry Christmas," she said. I quickly returned the greeting before she handed me a hot casserole dish. "I hate to see a man spend Christmas by himself, but I suppose you have your reasons. Still, there's no sense in you missing a good Christmas dinner."

I stumbled over the moment, thanking her profusely but then wondering if I was thanking her enough. I noticed her staring into the cabin at my portable computer.

"I'm a writer," I told her. That was true enough, but the lies that followed were just as easy. "I'm working on a novel and I needed some peace and quiet. That's why I'm here."

I don't know if she believed me or not but she gave me that "Ohhh?" sound that people always used when I told them what I did for a living. She was supposed to ask me what I was writing about but instead she just smiled and started to walk away. She stopped suddenly and turned toward me.

"By the way," she said. "Did you forget something?"

I leaned on the door a little bit but I don't think she could tell that a small but deadly wave of panic was running down my legs, making it very hard to stand. I knew that I had probably forgotten a million things in my life but I wasn't sure which one belonged to her.

"Rent's due today," she said. I might have kissed her had I not been stumbling like a drunken fool into the cabin to get my wallet. It was the rent. Only the rent. Thank you lord, thank you dear God in heaven, and I hope your son has a nice birthday.

I relished that meal. Savored every morsel of turkey dressing, cranberry sauce and mashed potatoes. Giblet gravy splattered on my shirt. I wiped the plate clean with a yeast roll and ate a slice of pecan pie with my fingers. I burped until late in the afternoon, sitting on the front porch, watching the swamp for signs that said I was okay, just another Joe sitting on the front porch, watching the swamp.

After awhile, I got up enough energy to return to my computer. Only this time, it felt right. I knew that my Ramblings were going somewhere, that, this time, nothing would be overlooked. Still, I wrote about everything but what I needed to write about. I wrote about chasing bad guys, digging for shit, and almost always finding both: The director of purchasing who went to jail when I nailed his ass for phony bids, the city manager's brother-in-law who extorted from city contractors; the police sergeant tearing up his son's DUI tickets.

I also wrote about how, on my way to becoming Mr. King Shit, everything started becoming routine. I guess it was still fun, sitting on the front row, living on the front page, but after five years of digging for shit and almost always finding it, I started thinking that maybe everything was shit and that the only reason some shit didn't stink is because somebody did a good job of covering it up.

It was right about then, after writing about all the shit, that I had to stand up and walk outside to look at the swamp. I got into my car. Drove for a couple of hours before I

found an open store. Drank two beers on the way back to the cabin. Walked along the shore. Tripped over a log and skinned my knee. Dropped my beer into the swamp. Went back to the cabin. Sat on the porch. Walked over to the boat ramp. Paid little attention to the hawks flying by. Went back for another beer and lay down for awhile. It was getting dark, Christmas was nearly over, the memories were as wet as the beer pouring through my brain, but still I could not sit down again at the computer to finish the story, to write what I knew I had to write.

"WHAT'S THE MATTER, ASSHOLE!?! CAT GOT YOUR TONGUE?"

But the swamp didn't answer me and I knew that it never would. It was me, only me. I had to write about it because I was the one who got the call. There were fatalities at a fire near my apartment, the overnight desk man said over the phone, and would I please, if it wasn't too much trouble, go over there and hang out until a police reporter showed up. It wasn't too late, I didn't have a date, so I said sure, be glad to.

It was four days before Christmas and we were having an unusual cold spell. That meant people unused to kerosene heaters were learning the hard way. There were fires all over the city. This one was a typical fire, I guess. It was one of those large, old houses broken up into a million apartments by some greedy landlord. Four or five engines and a couple of ambulances were already there and firefighters were trying to keep the flames from jumping over to neighboring houses. My press badge got me over the barricades and I found a supervisor leaning on an engine, sucking oxygen from a tank.

"Can you tell me what happened here, chief?"

He looked at me with what I guessed to be professional disgust. I know he saw my press badge

pinned to my coat but it didn't seem to matter.

"Get the fuck outta here," he said, gasping for breath.

I was going to ask him if I could quote him on that but instead I saw some medical technicians fumbling with some body bags. People were busy, a fire was raging out of control, but I needed a body count. How many people died? That's all I wanted to know. If I could get their names, great, but just the body count would do for a first-day story. So I followed the EMTs over to a neighbor's yard where people were standing around staring at a gray blanket, looking like maybe they could make something happen if they stared long enough or hard enough at the lumpy quilt on the ground. And then they took the blanket off and there they were, two little girls, probably no more than six or seven, with their nightgowns melted to their bare legs. One of them seemed to be staring into a street lamp, but the other one was looking at me. Her eyes were clouded over and there was some yellow stuff on her lips. At first I thought one of her hands was missing some fingers but then I realized they were there. They just didn't have any skin on them anymore. I don't know what it was, maybe all the smoke in the air, but for a minute there I could not breathe.

It was, of course, a hell of a story, page-one stuff for sure. When the police reporter showed up, I told him don't worry, I got it, and I proceeded to milk it for all it was worth. I got neighbors to tell me how sweet the two girls were. I got quotes from the firefighter who found the bodies ("Hardest thing I ever did"). And, for the kicker, I found out that the girls had been home alone and the police were looking for their single mother.

Fire stories normally run inside, but "Children Die in Blaze: Police

Seek Mom" was made for I-A. People started calling almost as soon as I walked in the next morning, telling me that the mother used to wait tables at a strip joint near Stone Mountain, and I started thinking that this might do the trick. A good tear-jerker just might break the monotony, the politics-as-usual rut I had begun to hate. Dead kids. A missing stripper. Almost Christmas. It was nearly perfect, I thought, as I told the editors that I would write the follow-up story.

I worked on the background stuff while a police reporter kept tabs on what the authorities were doing to find the missing mother. Slowly, but surely, bits and pieces of this woman's life began taking shape on my computer screen, a discolored montage of lines and letters that surrendered her secrets like they were so much fucking candy. With every phone call, every pointed question, the stuff of a stranger's life became my own, facts that I could use at my leisure.

Neighbors said she had seemed friendly but had way too many boyfriends. Bartenders at the Stone Mountain club said she was a good waitress up until the time she got caught stealing tip money from the dancers. State welfare agents would neither confirm nor deny allegations that they had been investigating her for child neglect. A computer at the Sheriff's Department verified that she had once been arrested for aggravated assault. And when the fire department said the two girls apparently tried to keep warm by lighting a faulty kitchen stove, I knew I had my story:

Police were still searching Thursday night for a former cocktail waitress with a checkered past who was not at home Wednesday when her two young daughters, apparently trying to keep warm, accidentally blew up the kitchen stove, killing themselves and causing neighbors to flee from

their burning homes.

The story ran across the front, right next to a picture of a charred Christmas tree. Solid, beefy guys in the pressroom came up to me and said they cried while reading it. People started calling the paper to see where they could donate money for the funerals. A columnist began working on a piece about parental responsibilities. It was the talk of the town. I said thank you, picked up my notepad, and rode off into the sunset. There were crooked politicians to exploit. A promise at Superior Court to fulfill.

It was just before lunchtime when the police reporter caught up with me in the parking lot. "They found her," he said. "Late last night."

I thought about it for a moment but then told him the story was his. I was busy.

"Yeah, well, I just thought you should know that she's at Georgia Baptist. She'll live, but apparently she's not in very good shape."

He told me what the police had found out, and as I listened to him, my throat started feeling funny, like maybe I was about to choke on something. I was thinking about the night before, what I might have forgotten, when the police reporter patted me on the shoulder and said, "Sorry. These things happen."

I interrupted several office parties at Georgia Baptist Hospital before I found her in the Intensive Care Unit. There were no worried relatives hovering around her bed, no floating heart-shaped balloons, no cards or flowers, and I started thinking that maybe there never would be. I stood quietly at the foot of the bed, watching the unconscious woman struggle with her breathing tubes. Half of her head was covered in bandages and a huge, nasty cut stretched across her face and down to her shoulder before disappearing beneath a thin blanket. She apparently had been crossing the street

on the day of the fire, the police said, when a drunk driver ran her over. Her purse was lost in the confusion and so she was rushed to the hospital as a Jane Doe. She had yet to wake up and so could not know anything about the fire, her children, the story in the paper...

I had to sit down. It wasn't my fault, I told myself, but I also had to admit that it wasn't hers, either. I stood back up. Who was going to explain it to her? Who was going to tell her that her children are dead? I started pacing, asking myself what I missed, what I should have done, who I should have called, who was going to tell her?

And then it hit me, an image, and even though I clinched my hands tight enough to hurt, and my legs got tired from walking back and forth, back and forth, the image would not go away. It's her, sitting up in her hospital bed. Someone hands her the newspaper. She sees the charred Christmas tree, the one her daughters had decorated. She reads the story, the one with my name on it, the one that details her every mistake, the one that blames her for the fire, the deaths of her children, the destruction of everything she had ever wanted, every dream she had ever wished upon. And she looks to the ceiling, a silent wail escaping from someplace that nobody ever knows, and I walk. Right on past her. I didn't even say I'm sorry. I just walked, down the hall, through the lobby, past the rows of newspapers, out to the parking lot and into my car. I know I stopped at a bank teller and emptied out my checking account, and I must have stopped at a store to buy beer, but all I really remember, all I can feel like remembering, is that I drove, as fast as I fucking could, until I saw a sign about some dead lakes.

And on Christmas night I finally sat back down at the scrawny table,

looked at the stuff I had written before, and very carefully deleted every fucking word. And then I started writing again. I wrote, "Living in holes is easy if the reasons don't come inside with you..." That was two days ago and I guess it's time for me to finish this. My shirt is covered with stains. My pants are ripped, a bloody knee has scabbed

over. I ran out of beer sometime yesterday, and I haven't eaten since that last bite of pecan pie. I think I'm afraid to finish this, afraid that I may have forgotten something, afraid because when I do stop typing, when I do find the last word, the last image, I'll have to do something else. And I don't know what that will be.

Barry S. Eisenberg
CHANGE IN VENUE

Pennsylvania rain rumbled and strafed
across the West Chester exit—
the one we were supposed to take—
paying a toll on our windshield:
A drumming devil of splatter
that sprayed fear and dissension
on our shared soul.

Pennsylvania rain taught us a lesson:
Skidding over a median strip
in total darkness
drives partners to mistrust.
I mapped the capillaries of Bucks County
and you squinted for roadsigns,
while everything unknown sat between us.
We cursed each other's indecision
and struggled to keep
our raging bladders secret
from each other.

When that last squealing U-turn
delivered us home, we raced
cramming four shoulders through the bathroom door
and laughing at our streams of relief.
A timer clicked on our bedside lamp;
the thermostat awakened the heater;
we were released.

Now, dripping naked on the shower floor
we find cohesion
in this climate-controlled environment.
Your fingers rake the garden of my face
for ingrown weed and outcrop.
We groom each other gently
in our domestic rainforest,
our tiled wetland,
where we'll wait out the monsoons.

SHORT STORY

MAD RIVER

Evelyn Sharenov

The elderly man walked to town once a week to buy his art supplies and stock up on provisions, it was two miles going and two miles coming, but Saul Berger looked forward to it so long as the good weather held.

The country road was lined with pine trees that loomed up into the low grey morning sky. When Saul grew accustomed to the absence of a paved gauntlet, he set off brazenly down the center of the road, swinging his cane in an arc, as if cutting a swath through jungle underbrush. He went at a brisk pace, with white plumes of breath billowing against the raw edge of the river wind. He wore a wool beret and a cigarette dangled from his lips. An old three-legged shepherd dog accompanied him, close by his side. They seemed undaunted by their infirmities.

Saul spoke to no one on these jaunts. He loved the measured silence of his weekly hikes. His only local friend, David, the attorney who sold him the Waterbury house, was usually with a client. There were no comfortable visits with old acquaintances, no games of checkers to while away a winter's afternoon. Although the old man with the mild stoop and his ungainly dog were familiar fig-

ures, the provincials still viewed Saul with a mixture of suspicion of the newcomer and distrust of the artist. And so he made his way alone.

He had located a store in town that sold Winsor and Newton oil paints. He wasn't sure, but he thought the new owner might be flirting with him; she kept up a constant stream of chatter as he picked out his weekly assortment of colors and she always had a treat for the dog. She tried to keep him there a little longer when he was about to leave.

Heading back across the grassy square from which the town radiated, Saul thought that one day he might ask her to dinner.

The walk home was particularly pleasurable. The early mists lifted to reveal green foothills behind the pines. A high sun, vivid and distinct, followed directly overhead, with the rapidly changing length of Saul's shadow following directly behind. The air was dry and cool at this time of morning, a reminder that these fine autumn days were numbered.

He clutched his tubes of paint and his small bag of groceries. He had a gourmet's taste in oils but simple taste in foods; he found that he required little fuel these days. He hurried now, climbing, anxious to see his house at the end of the road, amidst its gathering of trees. He crested a hill and stopped to catch his breath.

His heart was fighting and his lungs were sore. It was at this point that his body reminded him of the altitude, but he would have stopped here anyway, because it was from this spot he caught his first glimpse of home. The Waterbury place—it was difficult to think of it as the Berger place, even two years into his mortgage—was an old white A frame on several forested acres. The house was set back off the road about a half mile, partially hidden from view by the dense leafy cover of some ancient oak trees. It had a fireplace in the living room and one in the bedroom, a cheerful kitchen and a large bare attic with southern exposure through which Vermont's burnished sunshine streamed all day long. This became Saul's studio.

On days such as these, the vast sun-drenched afternoons of October, Saul took his paints and canvas into the woods out back of the house. He sketched rapidly in the perfect light, seated on a tree stump rotted by last winter's rains. The warm hazy air eased the stiffness from his fingers which were gnarled as exposed tree roots. Nearby a stream swept along between mossy banks, the tributary of an unknown river. Darting silvery fish mingled with the swift icy current.

The scent of turpentine and oils mixed satisfyingly with the scent of burning leaves. Saul did not squander these hours. Large rough hewn figures materialized on the canvas, bright blocks of color filled in the white spaces. He put his brush down, fisted and unfisted his fingers, picked it up again while gazing up at the sky where the trees parted to admit light. A formation of birds beat its way effortlessly and soundlessly to an equatorial climate. They appeared on his canvas, a dark ominous wedge; up close, however, they were Hebrew letters flying across the sky in a joyous exodus. The universe on Saul's canvas was a myste-

rious place, filled with the elemental spirits of the Jewish Otherworld, the Yenne Velt, a dreamlike landscape where magic was possible.

Saul's dog watched out of the corner of his eye. It gave the dog a crafty look, like a critic, but he quickly lost interest and burrowed deep into the piles of sun-warmed leaves. When the air reclaimed its edge, sharp with its underpinning of winter, Saul took the canvas to his studio to examine, in the bleak discerning light of the westering afternoon, what he had painted earlier. He remained a while, pacing and smoking, while shadows advanced across the floor and covered the painting like a sheet.

At sunset he lit Sabbath candles and poured himself a brandy. He had long forgotten the Friday evening prayers—they had been Rose's dominion—but the old rituals comforted him.

He poked up a blaze in the fireplace and settled down with his drink.

Sometime later the phone woke him. He had been dreaming about Michael, that he was still alive.

"Good Shabbos," David said.

"Thank you." Saul shook his head to clear it. For a moment he mistook David's voice for Michael's.

"Did I wake you? I let it ring a long time."

"No. No, That's all right. I was just dozing for a few minutes by the fire."

"I'm sorry. I just wanted to find out about tomorrow. The usual time?"

"Yes, of course. I look forward to it. As always. How is Peggy?" Saul was beginning to feel less vague.

"She's fine. She sends her regards." David sounded tired.

"You mean you're at home?"

"No, I'm still at the office."

"Well, when you see her send her my regards in return."

"I will. See you in the morning."

David waited. For moments neither

man hung up and then David's receiver clicked as though he had decided something.

David called Saul every Friday night to wish him a good Sabbath and visited Saul every Saturday. At his age, Saul reflected philosophically, everything happened once a week. They fished in the shallow stream on Saturday mornings and David pattered in the yard the rest of the day. Saul, who for the most part preferred not to be disturbed, had to admit he was grateful for David's company.

He finished his brandy, it was nine o'clock and he was wide awake. The night stretched before him, yawning and sleepless. Saul rarely slept in his bed anymore; instead he lay there listening to the companionable creaks and groans of the house settling; doors opened and closed on their own, letting spirits and drafts move through on their evening business. Saul existed on evening naps sitting by the fire or stretched out on the sofa, and perhaps another couple of hours towards dawn, when the darkness began to lift.

He went outside into the intoxicating cold and sat on the porch stoop. He loved to sit here each evening. The porch glittered in the moonlight, crisscrossed by silvery filaments, road maps for snails. The cool starlight of the Milky Way pressed against the austere silhouettes of the mountains. Surrounded by the silence of those great dark peaks, he felt he was at the center of a great mystery. Faith was belief in something unseen, but here was visible proof that some order reigned over the universe. When Michael died, Saul's faith had been badly shaken. There was a hierarchy to death that Michael had disrupted by dying before him. Children were your gift, what you gave back to the earth, and you stayed alive until they were ready to replace you. Saul had been horrified by the simplicity of

Michael's death. He shut himself in the bathroom and howled out his grief. The building shook with his savage wails. Somehow, he survived. Rose did not. Her grieving outlived her. Now, here in the mountains, Saul gradually became convinced that the human spirit outlived a man's body. The light and symmetry of the stars and mountains strengthened his faith, so that he came to believe there was a fixity to the universe. On perfectly clear nights such as this, he wished Rose were here to share his vision, his dream Rose, the silent red-haired girl he had had a heart slaughtering crush on, floating serenely above the urgent clamor of the lower east side on her own lake of quiet. She wore a single braid coiled around her head. He was a young socialist, full of hope, handing out leaflets in the milling anarchy of Union Square. He would speak to anyone who would listen, but confronted by Rose he was mute, stunned into silence. She pretended not to notice him on her marketing rounds.

Saul lit a cigarette and coughed. When he inhaled deeply, the night air was startling. Every year, in January, he quit smoking for a month. Although the quantity and quality of his morning cough had not changed in forty years, he was uneasy about it. Even so, he took up the pack again in February.

Behind the screen door, the dog whined. "What is it, boy?" Saul said. "The ghosts out tonite? They out to get you? Old Sarah Waterbury won't hurt you." The dog whined in response. "Well, come on out then, come on, boy," Saul urged him. The dog disappeared through his own door in the back, ran round the house and up the front porch steps to Saul. He settled beside him, sighing, his gaze steady as a lighthouse beacon, one eye opaque with age. Saul fed the dog an aspirin from a tin he carried during the cold months, when

their arthritis pained them most. The dog chewed eagerly, senile in his tastes.

Saul's last argument with Rose had been about the dog, a week or two before her stroke. Other than on the subject of the dog, Saul refused to quarrel with his wife, preferring the path of least resistance. But about the dog he was adamant. Saul had never owned a pet until the dog, and the dog was an accident. One day walking home from the store, he found the injured animal in the gutter. He wrapped the bleeding dog in his overcoat, carried him home and called the doctor. In their ignorance they amputated the dog's leg and saved its life. That the dog needed Saul was apparent to Rose. That Saul needed the dog was nothing she could grasp. She referred to it as 'that filthy animal' and insisted Saul get rid of it. Saul's voice, raised rarely since those early days when his youth and ideals asserted themselves in left-wing politics, was still resonant when he told her he would as soon get rid of her. Still, on nights like this Saul remembered even the dog arguments with fondness.

That was the thing that had fascinated Saul through all his years with Rose—that his image of a shy lovely girl, which he retained even after he met and married her, was seldom the woman who filled their apartment with her commotion, as if she wore a train of chaos behind her. When she left the room there was a quiet spot where she had been and that other girl returned in her wake. Strangely, during the last year of her life, Rose finally came to resemble that stubborn vision of the young woman who would not speak to him on the lower east side. For the year following her stroke, she lay in their bed; relieved of adult responsibility, she stroked and cuddled the dog the way a young girl holds onto a doll, in small childlike hands. She giggled and claimed she had always

loved the animal. When she tired of speaking, she wrote Saul love notes, her elegant Palmer penmanship eroded and shaky. And sometimes, just before she slept, she clutched weakly at the skin on her chest, plucking at it wordlessly, as if to show Saul there was a strong young girl's heart beating inside.

There had been a seamlessness to his marriage that Saul missed. Unlike David's marriage which strained at its seams. During his first year in Vermont, dinner at David's was an uncomfortable affair—evenings of raised voices that embarrassed him. He would shrink into himself for protection, anxious as a child who overhears his parents arguing. Then last year the atmosphere changed subtly. Dinner was silent, no clatter of passing plates, no noisy exchange of the day's events. No arguments. The children were quiet or absent. Saul did not understand what it all meant. Peggy seemed like a lovely woman. The two boys were sturdy and bright. And David's life, while not happy, was solid and comfortable. In recent months, Saul declined their invitations.

Saul was still sitting on the porch when David drove up at three in the morning. He was carrying a thermos of hot coffee and had deep shadows under his eyes. A frayed greying thermal undershirt showed at the neck of his bulky wool coat. It wasn't like Peggy to let David leave the house like that, Saul thought.

They passed a cup of steaming coffee between them; Saul's fingers almost dropped it, but David held his hands over Saul's.

"Why don't you wear the jacket I gave you?" Last Christmas David had given Saul an expensive down jacket from L.L. Bean which Saul had mistrusted from the start. It was cold to the touch and weightless, like a child's snowsuit. It lacked substance. He wore it occasionally, but only to please Peggy and David.

"Next time," he said. "I didn't know it would be this cold."

They watched the moon's pale crescent until it set; a thick insulating fog rolled in that time of day and season. Saul put on his old wool Buffalo plaid jacket; its familiar weight on his shoulders made him happy. Then David led the way to the stream and handed Saul a baited line.

Saul had grown skilled at this in the last two years; he even came to appreciate the challenge. He always caught several good-sized trout, yet it still surprised him that he was doing this at all. He didn't know anything about fishing when he moved to Vermont and befriended David, but he learned. He found it touching that trout liked miniature marshmallows as bait. And at the full moon in two weeks they wouldn't bite at all.

At times they seemed a step ahead of him. "When they're not biting, they're not biting," David told him time and again, it proved to be mad-deningly true.

David hooked a fighter. It rose straight up into the air, flailing and dancing on its tail like a dolphin. David reeled and pulled and gave line, but the fish spit out the hook and swam leisurely downstream. Saul laughed.

"Bastard fish. Shit. He ate the bait."

A moment later Saul got a bite. David grabbed for the fish while Saul yanked and reeled.

"Faster," David goaded, his voice narrowed with impatience. Saul's grip was precarious and his reeling painstaking; the line slipped, but somehow they got the trout into their basket. During the good hours around dawn they managed to fill the basket and sat back exhausted. They were panting and sweating. Cool light pierced the gloom now and fanned out, merged with the mists rising off the stream. Droplets of

spray condensed on their cheeks. Later, in the early morning sun, David stripped to the waist and cleaned the fish. He was quiet, huddled into himself. Saul watched him in silence.

The last leaves wreaked golden havoc around them, dying in a blaze of color. The air was so clear and winey it made Saul's eyes tear. Light filtered to earth through the branches, tracing mottled patterns in gold bursts across the moist soil and settled with the falling leaves. Sunshine poured into the stream, and some leaves with it, like small flames in the water. The sky was high and clear. During the summer it was impossible to see the sky through the galaxy of leaves, and Saul had moved in in summer, when things moved slowly and heavily and with great grace. Saul had danced out here in the close green air, his arms opened wide, his head thrown back, his fierce white hair flying as he did a little jig, all his stiff joints would allow. His legs were bandy as saplings, not strongly or deeply rooted, but he was like a starving man; his passion exceeded his physical limitations. He did not know the names of trees or flowers and he was overcome by the need to be able to identify them. Nearby the pale glimmer of the stream ran through the trees, like a gold vein through the earth. Saul took off his shoes and socks and dangled his feet; he scooped up handfuls of water and drank. He had never been so thirsty.

Saul looked over at David. "Excuse me. I didn't hear."

"I said I'm leaving Peggy. I'm getting a divorce."

Saul thought a while. "I guess I knew that last night, on the phone," he said finally. "Why are you doing this?"

"It's not working out," David said quietly. "We've progressed from subtle cruelty to open hostility." He

smiled sadly, his head turned away from Saul. He squinted into the sun.

"This is not a good enough reason, David. You've invested too many good years. You have fine children. What does Peggy say?"

"She agrees with me."

"Does she have a choice?"

"Since you put it that way, no. I don't think so. It's just as well if she doesn't make a scene."

"Peggy is a sensible woman. She doesn't seem like the type who would make a scene."

"Maybe that's part of the problem."

"You've been married a long time, maybe too long for passion, but that doesn't mean..." Saul said more to himself than to David. His children baffled him.

"It's more complicated than that," David explained.

"No it isn't. Divorce is easy. There are times in every marriage when it seems like the love has gone out of it and there's nothing left in common. It's like there's no glue holding it together. Believe me, I know the feeling." Saul smiled. "But those feelings pass," he said evenly. "You have the most important common ground a man and a woman can have together, your children."

"I'm not giving up my sons," David insisted.

"Yes you are. You don't know it yet, but you are." Saul raised his arms with his voice, for emphasis, then lowered them, feeling foolish. His head moved up and down adamantly. "Okay. Okay. Let's say you go through with this. What will you do?"

"Go back to teaching law, for one thing. The boys will survive. They hardly notice when I'm there." They were calmer, discussing the future.

When Saul met David, he was teaching part time at Boston University. The next year he gave it up to devote all his energy to his private practice. At the time, Saul did not

understand why. David limited his practice to probate and tax law. By nature he was not a litigator; he was a thoughtful man who preferred to settle out of court.

"Where are you staying?"

"I'm sleeping on the couch in my office until I can make other arrangements."

"That's no life for you, sleeping on a couch," Saul said. "How can you separate. One person walks away light, the other person walks away heavy. It's lopsided. You should go home and be a good father to your sons."

David would not look at him. "Come, Saul. I have to chop some wood for you."

Saul felt disquiet at this turn of events, an inexplicable sense of loss, as if he too faced an impending separation. He knew his talk sounded like the sentimental prattle of an old man, but he really believed in the sanctity of marriage. He could not understand how young people took divorce so lightly. Along with all its problems, he still loved the peace and familiarity of a worn-in marriage. There was a certain comfort to the day-in, day-out routine and the sameness of conjugal nights. All in all, he had been content. Each night, when his head touched the pillow, he fell immediately into a deep untroubled sleep. He was attractive to women, charming to Rose's friends. Two of them propositioned him, one before and one after her death. Secretly their attentions pleased and flattered him, but he never took advantage of the situation because the first affair paved the way for other infidelities; it made divorce easy, perhaps inevitable. If asked, he would have counseled his children the same way.

He watched David working. David split enough cords that afternoon to fill the woodshed with logs left over. David tended the Waterbury grounds with a respect that bordered

on reverence and with greater energy than he ever put into the law. Saul did not stop him, although he preferred to chop wood on a daily basis, using only an axe and preparing only enough logs and kindling for the next day or two. His hands had grown to the tools. He knew good timber. He recognized names of trees. He shovelled snow in winter, raked the yard in autumn, planted a garden in spring, all things David taught him, but still the younger man insisted on caring for the old house and the old man.

One of the first things to impress Saul about David when they met was that David knew how to do things. Saul liked him immediately, when David picked him up at Burlington Airport. The lawyer was large and quiet; he wore his hair longer and scruffier than the businessmen in New York City that Saul was used to. And everything that followed convinced Saul that David conducted his practice with integrity. They drove south, out of Burlington, into the Green Mountains. The roads meandered, like drunken speech, and they were lined with dairy farms set back against low hills. Saul would never have known they were climbing. David laughed when Saul got out of the car to stretch, and could not catch his breath.

"It's the altitude. You'll get used to it," he reassured Saul, who looked suddenly apprehensive. "And the world-class cows." Saul was staring at the vast array of grazing cattle. The landscape of David's childhood passed beyond the car window, but seen through the eyes of Saul Berger, the countryside was new and beautiful. David asked him if he knew how to run a snow plough, or operate a log splitter, did he drive a car.

"Can you survive a Vermont winter?"

"Why are we going over this again? We already discussed it on the phone."

"I guess I'm making sure that you know what you're doing and that you won't be sorry a month after you move in. It's a lot of hard work. The house is near the Mad River. It's damp, it's cold. You're in the mountains. They may look mild from a car window, but believe me, people die up here."

In fact, Saul did not feel very sure; he hesitated with the doubts accumulated over a lifetime of being taken care of.

David looked over at Saul. The old man's face was composed now, as if he had arrived at some resolve, a private trial he had set for himself.

"I can learn," Saul said calmly. His hands were folded in his lap, resting before the tasks they were about to undertake.

"Good, I'll do what I can to help."

Saul's mind was made up before he saw the house, although it turned out to be exactly what he wanted, a welcoming house, white, two stories tall—and it needed a tenant. David showed him around and then took him out back to see the grounds. When they came to the stream. Saul asked if it was a tributary of the Mad River.

"To tell you the truth, I tried to trace it once, when I was a boy, but I never did find its source. So, I can't honestly say. But we nicknamed it Squabble Creek anyway."

David left Saul to investigate on his own, to turn on hot water spigots, flush the toilets. The radiators clanged and steam hissed damply into the rooms. The stove burners all sprang to life. Saul walked slowly upstairs.

"The furniture is in storage," David called up after him. "I'll get it out and deliver it before you move in. That's if you want it."

Saul imagined that the furniture that would come with such a house would be very nice, very pleasant. "Yes," Saul said thoughtfully. "I want it." He looked into the large

bare bedroom on the second floor. Most empty rooms, he thought, you can't picture what they'll look like with furniture in them. But this house was different. He saw the bedroom with a four-poster, throw rugs and quilts, a wardrobe. A wonderful cheerful room.

He walked up another flight of stairs and found himself in the attic. It was airy and spacious, filled with afternoon light. The sloped ceiling stopped far above his head. Where pictures had hung, the walls were bright, as if fresh squares of white paint had just been applied. Everything had only recently been removed. The hardwood floor was worn where rocking chair treads had traced their thoughtful miles; a trunk here, a dressmaker's model there, dents where a sewing machine had once rested. Even empty, some presence remained. Saul felt it more in this room than in the others. This was where he would paint.

"Let's go talk business," Saul said.

They drove back the way they came, the mountains still benign in the slanting afternoon sun which was deflected by the hills into soft white shafts. A trace of winter's chill lingered in the spring day. In the long silence, Saul wondered if it were possible to know from the start that someone would be a good friend.

David's office was located in an old brownstone in the center of town. Small gold letters on the heavy wood door quietly proclaimed that he was an attorney. There was no secretary and only one phone line. Saul liked that. A fireplace shared a wall with the law books. Saul sat in a leather chair near it, warming his hands and feet. David stood at the window, looking down at the town square, his hands deep in the pockets of his corduroy trousers.

"You want the house?"

"Yes. I can buy it outright."

"That's not necessary, Saul. I can arrange it with the bank. I'll draw

up the papers." David stood there silently for some time. "You know," he said finally, "ours is one New England town that boasts a bell *not* made at Paul Revere's foundry." David grinned.

"Well, I don't know if I can move here then."

"Listen, there's something I want to say, but I'm deciding whether to say it or not. I don't want to hurt your feelings."

"Go ahead. Say it, whatever it is. You shouldn't worry with me."

David faced Saul. "You'll be the only Jew in a town of, how shall I put it?"

"Gentiles."

"Yes, Gentiles." David smiled again. "And they're cool to outsiders—not because you're Jewish. They won't even be aware of that. But just because you're a stranger." He stopped and sighed. "Don't misunderstand, Saul. They're good people, sturdy, but provincial. It's your basic self-contained New England town. Beautiful fall foliage. A thoroughly nasty winter."

Saul laughed. "I'm still waiting for you to say something that will change my mind."

"I'm not trying to discourage you from buying the place. The Waterbury estate is yours if you want it. I'm just telling you what you're getting into, because I like you."

"Well, that's settled then. When can I move in?"

"I'll have the place ready in July." David poured two brandies from a crystal decanter and they drank together. "To your new home," David said. "Personally I've always loved this town. I hope you'll be happy here. Exiles have a tendency to become enchanted by the natives and their ways."

The afternoon faded and then it was dark out and cold. From the window the well tended streets looked deserted, but something settled and final about the town

saved it from desolation. It was orderly and unhurried and reminded Saul of the Bronx of his childhood. A tavern down the street spilled warm golden light onto the pavement. Saul could see shadows moving inside. The windows were steamed with the cold breath and easy chatter of patrons who had stopped by for a quiet drink at the end of the business day.

"Were you planning on flying out tonite?"

"Well, no, I thought I would be flying back this afternoon, but I guess I can fly back tonite, or stay at a hotel until tomorrow."

"No, you'll stay at my house and have a good dinner and a good night's sleep. Meet Peggy and the kids. And I can thereby disprove any bad rumors you might have heard about Vermont hospitality."

Saul did not protest. He was tired and hungry. Talking to David was a comfort. David's office was a sanctuary.

David phoned his wife to say they would be home in an hour. He stood at the window and watched the homebound traffic on the street below. The bar emptied; a new shift arrived to take its place. Their conversation was brief. He hung up abruptly.

In the car David asked Saul why he was pulling up stakes to settle down here. For the second time in a month, Saul found it difficult to explain himself. Perhaps his daughter was right, that he was a crazy old man and not responsible for what he did. He only knew that he could not go on as he had been.

Saul thought. "Because I've always wanted to live in New England and paint," he answered finally. Nothing else could possibly account for leaving behind everything he knew.

"Rural longings," David said.

"Yes, something like that." The truth was—and he knew it—that it would have been impossible to leave

the lower east side when Rose was alive. They stayed put in their rent-controlled apartment on Second Avenue near the National theatre where they had seen many of the great Yiddish actors perform. Although Saul had graduated from Yeshiva to Ethical Culture, and Rose had been the daughter of lapsed Hasidim, the legacy of the Russian pale was like a settlement in their blood. Although Saul married Rose after Michael was conceived, the perimeters of their worldliness were still as tight and provincial as an armband.

After Rose died he was freed. He walked his dog across town every day to Washington Square Park. He chose an empty bench and sat while the dog romped to the fountain and back. He remembered old friends who, over the years, used to join him there for a game of checkers. He did not miss them, but he remembered them so vividly it seemed like missing. And he worried—that the shorter the future, the longer the past and the more he was living in it. Since Rose's death, for instance, his memory of her had grown disproportionately large. At times it threatened to overwhelm him. When she was alive, he hated the dependence with which she ruled their lives. Now that she was dead, he admitted how much he had come to depend on her to provide the order and security in his life.

Yet when Miriam asked him to move to Long Island, he refused. He did not want to live with her and her husband, a surgeon with a lucrative practice. Their lives were noisy and unfamiliar. They were very modern people. They saw a marriage counselor. His daughter was taking a doctorate in psychology, despite her training and aptitude in music.

So he continued his cross-town walks and in time adopted a way of looking at things, this being neces-

sary to Saul, to make sense of his existence. He drew the bare bones outline of a new life for himself.

"What do you paint?" David transformed Saul's park bench into a dark quiet country road.

"Scenes from Jewish folklore. I try to show that aspect of Jewish life in a contemporary setting—on New York City streets," he explained. "Are you familiar with Marc Chagall? It's like Chagall's work, but not on a Russian shtetl."

"It sounds very interesting. Have you exhibited anywhere?"

"Well, I haven't really had the chance to be more than a weekend artist until now. The store took up most of my time. Sometimes I exhibit in the Village. They have a sidewalk show a couple of times a year."

"I'm looking forward to seeing your work. You'll have all the time you need to paint when you move up here," David said. "What about your daughter. What does she think about your plans?"

"She would have you believe that I'm some sort of renegade free spirit, traipsing up to New England to paint and have a fling with some chippy."

David laughed.

"She asked me to move in with them, but it's out of the question."

"She must be upset."

She was a great deal more than upset, Saul thought. There had been ugly talk of competency hearings, but Saul would not be threatened.

"I don't know what's the matter with her. I guess sometimes people confuse wisdom with growing old gracefully," Saul said mildly and smiled.

They drove the rest of the way in silence. David's house was prosperous looking, on a quiet well-heeled street outside of town. It was comfortably heated and lit against the cold night. Peggy served them dinner—baked pork chops and dump-lings. She and David's sons had already eaten.

In retrospect, Saul was able to interpret the signs—the looks and remarks that later became a divorce. But that night Saul was sleepy and full and they seemed like an ideal couple.

"Do you eat pork, Mr. Berger?" Peggy asked.

David rolled his eyes in his head and looked at Saul as if to say, see what I mean?

"Yes, I eat pork and shellfish," Saul said politely, ignoring David's look. "And call me Saul, please."

David tells me you've bought the Waterbury place. I'm glad you're to be our neighbor," Peggy spoke quietly. Saul thought she was lovely. She wore a flower print skirt and heavy Aran sweater. Her blond hair was tied back in an elegant chignon. And although her fingernails were long and perfectly painted—something Saul had never trusted—it did not take away from the unmistakable air of refinement about her.

"New York is no place to live these days—too dangerous."

Somehow, Saul could not imagine Peggy intimidated by anything.

"I'm looking forward to moving in," he said.

When they finished dinner, David suggested they have more brandy in his study.

"No more brandy for me, thank you."

"But the night's young," David protested, grinning. "We aren't done celebrating. After all, it's taken me years to part with the Waterbury house."

Although he was exhausted from his trip and the events of a long day, Saul was coming awake again, invigorated by a sense of adventure blowing on Vermont's abrasive winds. He followed David into his study.

David downed a shot of whiskey and poured himself another. "Sure you won't join me?" Saul felt obliged

to sip at a liqueur while he listened. "I handled the probate for the Waterbury estate years ago but held onto the house."

Saul waited expectantly for more.

"My father owned the adjacent property. When I was a boy, I spent most of my time over there. You have to understand. The Waterburys were more than neighbors to me. I played there. I kept their yard for them. I did the handy work around the house. I guess I held onto the place for sentimental reasons. You're the only prospective buyer I've considered selling it to."

"Why me?" Saul asked cautiously.

"Just a feeling that you're right for the house and it's right for you."

Saul's glass was empty.

"Help yourself," David said.

Saul poured himself another liqueur and wandered around the deeply shadowed room. He looked at David's books and admired his prints. His desk was inlaid with oxblood leather; on it a green banker's lamp cast a dome of golden light. Propped against the lamp were several photos, old sepia-tones in engraved silver frames. Saul silently fit their shapes and sizes into the blank spots on the attic wall. David turned them for Saul to see. They could have been anyone's European ancestors. A small green velvet box was set near the photos, Saul raised its lid. The initials SW were embroidered on its underside, and the hollow was filled with spools of thread, needles, a pincushion, from the sewing loft. Saul carefully lowered the lid, so as not to disturb it.

"Let me show you something," David said, reaching into his pocket. He brought out his wallet and opened it to a yellowed photo of a young woman in a corona of red hair and a white lace blouse. She looked foreign and old-fashioned, abundantly built, with a generous smile. She had emotional eyes, caught in a

moment of gaiety. David fingered the brittle corners of the photo.

"She's very lovely," Saul said. Their heads were bent close together in the small circle of light, their faces dense white in the darkened room. The resemblance to his young Rose was unnerving and tantalizing. He waited for some explanation. "Who is she?" he finally asked.

"Sarah Waterbury. Gustav Waterbury met and married her in Boston. She was Jewish. I think she came from Russia originally. She used to tease me when I was a boy, tell me a different story every time I asked her. She had a thick accent that sounded like Russian to me back then. She died when I was away at law school. She was only thirty-five."

Saul nodded over the photo. "She could be from Russia—perhaps the steppes, where my wife's people were from."

David leaned closer to Saul. His eyes flashed with an energy Saul had not seen earlier.

"I knew you'd be able to help me."

David carefully replaced the fragile photo in his wallet. Saul imagined him as a boy, stricken by the gracious and exotic creature in the picture, not indigenous to Vermont but imported, like an animal in a zoo, a stranger rich with tales. Even after her death, David carried this woman within him, in a photo, a memory, an idea of a perfect wife.

"What was Rose like?" David asked.

Saul thought a moment, considering his answer. "She looked a lot like Sarah. She was a beautiful girl. She loved the opera. She talked a lot. She was strong willed and, in the end, not what I expected."

"You loved her a great deal?"

"I loved her, yes," Saul said carefully.

David's sons knocked softly at the door. For a moment, Saul stared at them without recognition. He ex-

pected them to resemble Sarah Waterbury in some way. They were both tall and handsome, a perfect blend of Peggy and David. Saul smiled. The boys politely said good night to their father and Saul.

"I guess I'll go to bed now too," Saul said. "You know, I've only lived in two places my whole life. This will be the third."

"I'll do my best to make you feel at home."

During July Saul closed up the apartment. When he tired of throwing things in boxes he sat on the double bed and tried to summon memories of a life lived here. When Michael and Miriam were young and had nightmares, he and Rose would take them into this bed, between them, to spend the remainder of the night in dreamless secure sleep. Those were the years when Rose was like the sun, and he and the children were like planets revolving around her. She was the center of gravity, of light and warmth. There was something to be said for raising children in one home, so that it was their refuge, no matter what happened outside of it.

He remembered his last night with Rose. A series of small strokes had drawn her from him. Saul sat beside her on this bed and unbraided her hair which had never been cut. Her skin was pale and soft, her shoulders cool, her bones settled. As he combed the two ankle length plaits into a thin colorless mass, he felt suddenly defeated. He stayed awake all that night. She died quietly before dawn and Saul comforted the dog.

All of it seemed to have happened to someone else in another life. The bed would go. He was glad to be rid of it.

Miriam came to take away Rose's clothes. He had lost track of the years, sitting there. His daughter stood before him, not the young girl he expected, but a beautiful woman in full middle-age. In one hour she

filled the house with her uproar and utterly disrupted his morning. She was Rose's girl.

She brought him a color television as a going away present, something he had never gotten around to buying for himself. She helped him pack and then sat near him on the bed. Saul felt uncomfortable. He tried to tell her that he appreciated her offer, that he knew there were many children who wouldn't do as much for a parent. But that there were two ends to the umbilical cord and he had to let go of his end. As it was, he said very little but he felt that they had made peace.

They embraced awkwardly. When she left, the apartment seemed empty, as tranquil as a still sea. The Salvation Army took away the furniture. Saul bought an old Volvo and in the middle of a sultry August afternoon he drove north into New England.

As he promised, David had taken the furniture out of storage and stocked the pantry. The house was clean and suddenly filled with life. David unloaded Saul's car, his art supplies and clothes, one suitcase haphazardly packed. David looked at him.

"Is this all?"

Saul's paintings arrived a week later. David was there to unpack the shipment and examine the canvases. He went through them silently. There were paintings of street vendors on Orchard Street, fish mongers on Canal Street, angels who hovered low over the city like a chupah—a wedding canopy; there was one of a golem who prowled the streets of Brooklyn protecting the Jews; there was one of Hasidim in dark raiments who filed down the sidewalk like Dead Sea Scrolls; there was a bag lady riding the subway, possessed by a dybbuk—an evil spirit that caused madness.

"Don't you care for them?" Saul asked.

"I love them, Saul." He stopped at a portrait of a young red-haired woman. "Is this Rose?"

"Yes."

"Come, let's hang some of these," David said. He centered the portrait of Rose above the mantel and then stood in the middle of the living room staring at it for some time. The painting portrayed a beautiful silent woman, Saul's indelible image of Rose.

"You have a wonderful family," David said.

David stopped by each afternoon those first few weeks, when Saul felt displaced and the house was dream-like, as if he had wakened into it. David brought books—volumes of transcendental poetry, Emerson's essay on self-reliance, Thoreau's studies. He loaned Saul his own earworn copy of Izaak Walton's quaint treatise on fishing. Saul read all of it. They drank whiskey in iced coffee on the porch and shared secrets. By this time their friendship was strong enough to shoulder the burden of confidences. Other times they sat silently, their common ground unspoken.

On a drive to town, Saul discovered the local art gallery which owned a distinguished collection of American primitives. These were not new to Saul, but finding them again at this time in his life seemed like a sign. Their innocence made him ache with longing for a home he had never known. He kept returning to the gallery, afraid they would change the exhibit some night.

On occasion he visited David's office; although he preferred not to disturb him at work, David never seemed to mind. One afternoon, Saul knocked at David's door to drop off his books and found David hanging a print that Saul had once mentioned was one of his favorites. Hanging next to it was one of Saul's paintings. David had taken one

thousand dollars off the price of the house in exchange for this portrait of an elderly couple expecting their first child while waiting to be released from Ellis Island. It was titled Simka and Samuel in New Hebron.

"To give you a head start on your new career," David had said.

Saul's life was hectic that year. Peggy and David had him to dinner once a week. Miriam phoned every few weeks. Strangely, she did not summon up an image of his family the way David did. Saul's work took up the rest of his time. He approached larger canvases like a climber welcoming the chance at greater mountain ranges. His brush strokes were broader and firmer. He applied more pure colors. He did not miss the old neighborhood, although he mourned for Michael on the anniversary of his death by reciting the Kaddish in a voice as hoarse as the shofar's bellow. David was right. He was in love with the town, with David and his family, with David's immutable yearning.

The next year David gave up teaching; he hired a secretary and installed a push-button phone in his office. David put on weight that year; he seemed to grow larger and heavier with some sadness. Saul saw less of him. As it should be, he told himself. David needed a life for himself.

And now he had left Peggy. But instead of being restored to some former peace, David moved restlessly from chore to chore. Even sitting still, he unsettled Saul.

In the late afternoon the two men raked the last of the leaves. A raw wind, hollow and consuming, came down out of the mountains, whipping the dust and leaves into brightly colored twisters that looked like small clay colored golems to Saul. They worked against the wind, straining and sweating with the labor, Saul willing his fingers to work. When the wind finally settled they burned

what little they had gathered and watched the smoke rise in the cold silence of dusk.

"Would you like to stay for dinner," Saul asked more out of obligation than desire. He was exhausted.

"No. No thank you," David said. "I'll just grab a bite in town."

"Well at least come in for a drink." The whiskey made Saul braver about sending David on his way.

That night, the autumn layer of seasons settled and was buried beneath the beginning of winter, Saul sat inside while a thin rain gave way to an early snow. He took the dog out later. By then sleet coated the roads with a sheath of ice. Saul stood there, wet through, his ears and cheeks stinging from the frozen rain. The dog romped wildly, his muzzle dripping slush. Headlights wound slowly up the road to the house. A second car swerved up behind the first. Saul stepped back. His heart pounded in his ears and he began to sweat. There was no noise, no sound at all, everything drowned out by his rushing blood. Blurred androgynous figures ran towards him. Red lights flashed demoniacally in the dark. When his vision cleared, Saul saw they were men, two policemen and David. One policeman supported David and the other one approached Saul.

"We picked him up in town, sir, and he insisted he was staying with you, so we escorted him up here."

"What was he doing?"

"He could hardly stand. When we asked him to walk a straight line, he refused to do it without a net." The young policeman smiled. "We know him. We don't want to lock him up for the night. And I don't want to take him to his wife this way."

Saul laughed. "That's all right. He's staying with me, at least for tonight. I'll take care of him."

The policeman stood there uncertainly.

"Really," Saul reassured him, "it's

all right. I can manage. You can go now."

The other policeman transferred a leaning David onto Saul's arm.

"I'm dick-in-the-dirt drunk," David said as Saul walked him into the house.

"Indeed you are," Saul said. Saul stayed up with him most of the night, as he had the first time Michael came home drunk. They sat on the cool bathroom tiles; every half hour Saul held David's head over the bowl while he brought up the rank vestiges of partially digested wine. Finally Saul undressed and bathed him. He was queasy and stiff from hours of squatting on the cold floor.

"Can I live with you?" David asked when Saul put him to bed.

"We'll discuss it in the morning," Saul said, but David was already in an uneasy sleep.

"I'm sorry about last night," David said in the morning.

"Nothing to be sorry for," Saul prepared oatmeal and scrambled eggs. David objected but Saul insisted he eat it.

"It's just that I was feeling very sad and sorry for myself."

"I understand."

"About what I asked you," David said. "I meant it."

"I know. But you can't stay here. You're forcing me to live in a past I don't belong in."

David looked at him closely. "I thought you, of all people, would understand."

"That's just it. I do understand. That's why I'm telling you to go home to Peggy. You fight it through. You stay together. Take the picture out of your wallet and go home."

David stood and looked around. His face was pale and exhausted. When he moved he was shaky, perhaps wondering if this were the last time he would stand in Sarah's house or what he was supposed to do to make things right. Finally, his eyes became remote, shadowed.

"David, sometimes the success of a marriage can be measured by the weight of its years."

When David left, Saul was alone. The house was finally empty—no Rose, no Sarah. He fried an egg in margarine and ate without tasting it. On Friday he waited for David to call. He did not hear from him all winter, nor in the spring.

The cold that winter was so brutal it seemed to fuse his bones so that his spine and legs were single sticks. He touched things without feeling them. He worked at keeping the snow cleared from the driveway, just in case. Men dropped dead of heart attacks from shovelling snow, he thought, but he kept the driveway clean and covered with rock salt anyway.

He watched the mountains guardedly for months. The view was unchanging; still, he gauged the blank white landscape. Solemn black pines rose from it like missiles. The horizon was seamless, the mountains indistinguishable from the sky.

During the last week of winter there was a blizzard. The storm was dazzling and the dog ran joyous drunken circles in it, his ears flat, his tail flying, until he lost the scent that connected him to home. Saul heard him barking excitedly and went out to find him. In the commotion he forgot his cane. The snow blew from side to side, obliterating all sense of direction. The world was white and shadowless as a blank canvas. He shouted into the wind's mad wailing, but the sound got trapped in the crossfire of ice. In confusion he wandered a few feet and stopped, suddenly lost. He realized he could not find his way back to the house, although if he moved one way or another he might be able to reach out and touch it. He began to cry. The dog whined somewhere nearby but Saul could not see him and the storm's racket made it impossible to judge distance accurately. He called

to him, inching slowly, carefully forward, his arms extended in front of him. Hours seemed to pass; in fact only minutes had gone by when Saul touched the white siding of the house. He kept his hand on it while reaching out with the other, feeling blindly for the dog, calling to him above the frenzied wind, guiding him with his voice. Saul felt wet fur in his free hand. The dog panicked and struggled. Saul let go of the house and grabbed the dog in both his arms and the two of them stumbled and fell. Saul dragged himself and the dog inside. He was shivering with fear and cold and crying again, gratefully now.

"Aren't we silly?" Saul said to the dog, still weeping with relief. He swiped at his eyes. The great shudders that seemed to propel him through the blizzard subsided and were replaced by the certainty that he was a ridiculous old man. He undressed and put on a flannel robe; he wrapped the dog in an old towel and they sat by the fire all that day and most of the night.

Miriam called later in the week. He assured her that everything was just fine, that he was all right in the Vermont winter. She warned him not to shovel snow, to call someone else to clear the driveway, a strong young man. When he hung up, he was flushed with humiliation.

By spring Saul was afraid to leave the house. On the days he forced himself to walk to town, he waited on the sidewalk until there was no traffic coming in either direction before he would cross the street just in case he couldn't make it from curb to curb on one green light. He never saw David.

Early one Friday in May, Saul was halfway home when the winter's exhaustion caught up with him like a fellow traveller. It was the mildest day of the year, filled with good will and warm breezes. The thick soft nap of roadside grass looked so in-

viting that he sat down in it. The dog sat beside him in a patch of wildflowers. Sunshine spread everywhere. Saul removed his wide brimmed straw hat and turned his face up to the light. A slender thread of warmth connected him to the earth. He could see the house. They were safe.

A car passed but he decided not to call after it. It pulled over and then strong arms were around him, lifting him, repeating his name.

"Michael, is that you? I was so tired, I just stopped for a minute to rest." Saul squinted up at the tall man who held onto him. "David," he said, at first bewildered. "David," he said happily. "I'm glad you're here."

"Are you all right?" David asked. "Here, let me help you. Come on, get in the car. I'll drive you home." He helped Saul into the back seat. The dog hopped in after him. "Lie down if you want. I was just on my way to see you."

"I'm all right now," Saul said. "I was just out of energy." For the first time that spring, he noticed the wild profusion of color outside the car window—life demanding and reborn. "It's such a beautiful day."

At the house David brewed strong tea and added a liberal shot of whiskey to each cup. "Let's drink these on the porch," he said. As he gave Saul his cup, he covered the old

man's hands with his own and held them. They were cool to the touch, but Saul's pulse was strong and his color was good.

"I'm all right," Saul said. "Really. The heart's sound." He tapped his chest and smiled. David seemed reassured.

Each man thought the other looked a little older.

"I'm sorry I called you Michael back there. I know Michael's dead but sometimes I get confused. It was a hard winter." Saul yawned broadly. "But it's over." He looked closely at David.

"It's good to be back."

"It's good to have you back."

They sat on the porch and watched the sun set, leaving them in a mild amethyst twilight. A pale spring moon rose, like a nightlight for the mountains.

"I'm teaching again, a couple of days a week," David said. "And I'm living at the office. I got rid of my secretary." They were quiet for a while. "I don't have much money, what with the divorce and cutting back on my practice." He looked at Saul. "I tried, Saul. It was no good."

Later David brought groceries and cooked. The kitchen filled with the smells of good food and the noise of a family and once again there was laughter in the house.

Michael Eldrich
RUNNING FOR AIR

Remember last fall when Charlie's son
ran from the Chevron after six years
doing fine in brakes and exhaust?
He stripped down to his shorts
and tried to catch a logging truck
on its way out with his bare hands.
His thin white feet slapped the pavement until he caught
a tamarack on the bottom of the load by the bark,
and it grabbed him back—hanging, dragging him, to the end of Main.
Crazy, running. And nowhere to run to.

I was the first one to get to him,
his hands all bleeding like Christ-I-don't-know-what
from where he'd hung up, the dead wood settling in the air around him.
He mumbled how the woodsmoke was choking him, making him sick.
Debbi's whores and the Reformed Baptists leaned out of their doorjambs
to stare.
He cried. But you couldn't really hear him.

Once in a while I almost run to the blue air of the prairie myself.
Sunday that nearly perfect bartender, Bobbi at the Lucky,
followed me home. But I only thought about the three fingers
she's missing and the meat cutter she lost them on.
I didn't love her. I know everybody in town, and I don't love any of them.
But you can't run away from work.
She left her gum on one of my pillows, like an insult.

The next night I had to hold feeble Clarence back because
Bobbi was banging Big Jean's head on Walt's pickup bumper.
When I put my hand out to stop him, I felt
the heart run uneven and fast like a blown tire at 70,
trying to bust out of his chest. I wouldn't let them
break his wrinkled old bones by accident.
Never run to a fight. Fighters punish themselves.
Jean's head split open where one of Bobbi's bloody hands
held her red-on-red hair. And I still didn't love her.

Any quiet night in the winter, like tonight
—with smoke from home fires that burn oven-hot all over town,
the snowplow making maze walls of the streets,
the false comfort of a small town's silent night,
I think I'm choking too. I think, "Hell."
But then I have a drink and a walk,
and Black Velvet opens up my throat like medicine.
And I sing to the dark about other towns, other jobs, distant love.
I just sing and stagger home,
but I never run.

Gladys Pruitt
SISTERS WASHING WINDOWS

Through fifty-year old
panes your face appears,
blurred as rain-stirred

dust smearing cheeks
separated by leaded glass.
You, on one side; I on the

other, pointing to streaks
clouded as dark words
never forgotten.

Forgiveness,
like compassion, is
sometimes feigned.

A sponge dipped in
vinegar water,
raised on a spear to

mock a man's burning
thirst or rubbed across
glass to clean old panes.

SHORT STORY

COOKIES

Samuel Blair

It was a Sunday of idleness, a nonsectarian Sunday.

The grass had grown thick, yellow strands bobbing above the green like unstable warning buoys, while flowers edged up on brown bare spots, all in disarray (never that neat to begin with) since Dad died. Up two short flights of concrete steps partly barred by lime-green stems falling over the path and spider-strands and leaves, and you'd be between our place and the neighbors', a shadowy alleyway. A sharp left took you into sunshine, flat and yellow on our concrete driveway, and in the front yard was the hedge Joan, Seth and I—sometimes enemies, sometimes allies—vaulted after the frightening sprint from the front door to land enthusiastically flat on the grass.

And then, inside to look out the window, down the hill, and onto the dark, deep lake.

I was home to house-sit. Mom had gone to Wilbur, Nebraska, her tiny Czech birthplace, for a fiftieth high school reunion. It was strange to be back after years in my U district apartment and base of operations for temp jobs. On the bus, passing American flags flapping on impac-

cable flagpoles as proud as if transplanted from famous battleships and aircraft carriers, I re-remembered what a Republican nabe it was—give the Republicans credit, they know how to manage a front-yard garden.

But I was hungry and restless and wanted something. No television—I was exercising my will-power—and no books, either. Finally it dawned on me: I wanted cookies.

The house, now, was sterile—less sentimentally lush each year, more dry and hard, the furniture like tough bones, and the wall-paintings distantly modern—so I said goodbye and stepped into the nice cool of a summer evening, blue sky glinting with a suggestion of silver.

In the dirt close to the hedge, roses swayed dangerously, blood-drops dripping from their thorns to make small circles in the earth. As I climbed the steep angle of our cement driveway, I heard something caw. I turned. On a curling green branch of our tallest backyard evergreen, just seen over our khaki roof-tiles, was a pterodactyl: taut green skin flashing like desert pebbles in the sun, eyes rolling in that self-satisfied dinosaur way.

This set me off feeling good—down the street, past houses politely boxy and rigid, the chimney-stacks, the fences. You could see two long

bridges like intricate constructions of wire, string and grey Leggo cross the wide blue water, and touchingly small cars go silently across. Over everything, like an anthem in a forgotten language, was the sound of a single lawnmower singing the song of the dead as they rose through the earth in waves of grass, the quiet Seattle Indians who had lived here amongst an infinity of trees. The air was rich, as ever, with anticipation of something that never happened—that happens only in dreams.

The trees were talking. As I crossed 65th and headed along 52nd—which began to undulate, serpentine—I could hear distinct words in the leaves: *attention...solarium...attaboy...* Secret things were happening. From behind a rhododendron, a toy truck, bold orange metal, rolled onto the sidewalk, up to the curb. Its van, filled with pennies, lifted, and the coins went jingling down through the slots of the gutter-drain. From below came laughter, jolly and piteous.

Behind the picture windows were mechanized mannequins, really life-like, ambling from left to right or lifting robots, hands holding teacups to plastic lips.

But in one house, dark in the growing shadows, was a real person: an old man with white hair pressed against his head, pale hands gripping the armrests of his chair, mouth turning in and down, a deep crease of a frown as if ravenously sucking at the spark of life, while his eyes, darkened by the Second World War, stared helplessly down at the water, at the bloody bodies about to wash onto the shore.

When I arrived at the grocery store, there was a return to bustle, meaningless adult stuff. The cashier and I chatted as I bought the cookies, tried a few jokes that didn't connect. The cookies were wrapped in a small brown bag, which I tucked beneath my arm, stepping out.

. . .

The air dimmed on the way home. Inside, I went into the kitchen, over to the new refrigerator, a big humming thing more spacious and sharper than the round-shouldered refrigerator we'd used to own, that had shut or opened with the jerk of its metal latch. This one of course used noiseless magnets, and made no comment as I took a 7-Up bottle.

Outside the kitchen window, the opposite shore was becoming dark, still more trees than houses. How wild the neighborhood had used to be: huge vacant lots filled with free-growing berry bushes, a patch of real forest near the Naval Station by the water, and train tracks since replaced by a concrete path for joggers. The scattered reflection of a golden sun shimmered on the water.

In an incredible quiet, I went from room to room: Joan, the eldest, with her toy theater and pink canopied bed, her intellectual books along the shelves, prissily superior—the study with Dad's incomprehensible physics texts along the wall, blocks of graph paper at the desk, and, above the file cabinets, his photo—a ghost of hair waving over his bald top, eyes gentle, mouth gentle, the peculiar distance of a man never entirely within the real world—all kept as a memorial since his heart attack ten years ago; Mom's things in the dining room, a new austerity as Dad's midwestern sentiment gave way to something more tribal: Indian prints, masks, and business books for her work at City Lights.

Now I went down the wooden steps to Seth's neatly ordered gadgetry: oscilloscope made from a kit, tiny pocket camera, model Atlas booster rocket, that, as I clicked the door behind me, lifted in expanding clouds of white smoke.

Majestically, it glided overhead, dropping booster after booster, leaving only the foil-plated landing cap-

sule, delicate as a spider, which settled to land on a ferry steamer model that chugged over the linoleum floor. But now Seth's science-fiction books had begun to fly, flipping and diving through the air, or else settling in an angry row, wings whirring like electric fans.

Frightened, I went to my room. A small room—of all those in the house, the smallest, a nugget of flame like a secret burning coal, the walls painted orange. Ashes, too: half-finished paintings, toy soldiers, and pieces of games scattered, an elemental mess that no-one dared clean.

Half-visible flames took shape before my eyes, a dance of fire, a waltz of solar flares spattering, scattering, as they surged up to make a castle, lava rivulets for turrets and parapets, a flame drawbridge lowering over a flame river.

But fire can't keep form; and it collapsed leaving me cinderized to totter out, gasping in the cool downstairs air, humming like a silk-scarf pressed over electrified steel. And this gave way too, and so did I, almost falling.

From the playroom came sad howls from Piccolo, our furry half-terrier, half-Chihuahua, dead now these fifteen years, who sang in loneliness each night when locked away from our rugs and sofas. I began to weep. But I couldn't stay. I went up the stairs and saw that, as always, the transformation had happened:

Bright lights shone on the far side of the water, a distant, precious carnival. Red bulbs rotated in the stately circle of a Ferris wheel, and cars parked in a vast parking lot, a conglomeration of everybody in Seattle. I heard tinkly tunes and laughter: the future that had never followed the time of home, our sweet years of make-believe.

chuckle of plastic unwrapping.

They were perfectly pill-shaped, the cookies, and left a dance of golden dust behind when I brought them to my mouth. A scent of sugar, of milk, the easy crunch between my teeth, and the firm good feel like shortbread sandcastles breaking open.

Hands and mouth moved embarrassingly fast, one cookie after another after another. My stomach bloated until, as the body thickened, the self dissolved. Monday—and the unreality of short tempers and meaningless crises—I no longer believed in. I was ten years old again and ready for sleep.

So, downstairs to the basement smell, the damper air; and to my room, clothes off, and into bed. Heavy with sugar, I sank through a hundred mattresses. Everything was weighted: the blankets, the pillow, the darkness all over. Dark things swam in the dark: invisible books, the chair by my desk, my coathangers flittering about like bats.

And above, subtle on the wood floorboards, were footsteps. I could still recognize them: Joan's light and pittery, Seth's solidier with self-assertion, Mom's slippered shushing, Piccolo's toenails.

And in the study, with the noise of his chair going back on its rollers, were Dad's gentle footfalls—which coughed to a stop as he settled down to work.

The cookie-box opened with a sandpaper sound and then the

Charles Hood
ENGLISH

At first it sits in my mouth
as quietly as a tooth,
but when I hold the x-rays
to the bulb I can't help
but admit that it is
half aardvark, half applesauce,
jerry-rigged and not built
to code. It began frankly enough
and is ending in a period
of buckaroos and bucket shops, of
buckteeth and Buck Owens and Buck Rogers
and Mr. Rogers. Is there static?
Can you say "roger wilco"?
Wouldn't it be something if Cosmo girls
only slept with cosmopolitans,
if the clipped beauty of the word "slept"
didn't sweep me back to *Beowulf* every
time I heard it? That Grendel,
he was a gangsta, he dissed Hrothgar,
so Beowulf pulled a big mother *cuchillo*
and made him get to the point. After
alliteration came the missionaries,
two by two like animals from the ark
or like Mormons, Augustine building
for the Jutes and Picts a marquee
that said "Latin, the Sequel,"
since Hadrian's wall hadn't corralled it
the first time. There's a second time
for everything, for love, for language,
even for *Star Trek*, though Captain Kirk's
name is really *church*, right Scotty?
English grew like a beanstalk, what with
regionalism and then the Vikings,
who drove Barbie and Ken to the marshes
of Somerset and wouldn't let them say uncle
until they learned to scrub plows, scrape skins,
gild eggs, and kid swans. We all
talk funny, but in Norse the sky's
the limit, ask anybody. Then in 1066
Wild William of Normandy came
and Old English went. Face it,

French is good for nothing, not even opera,
but try telling that to your landlord.
Of course the proles didn't know an RSVP
from an MVP, and still ate chitlings
with their fingers, too dumb to call
ejaculation "the little death."
After the Hundred Years' War
they got even twice, at Agincourt
and on D-Day, which is why
they have french fries in Paris.
You don't need a vowel shift
to eat a Big Mac. And Shakespeare?
He Leo Buscaglia'd English until
the cows came home, throwing block parties
even for prepositions, teaching us
to enjoy the difference between crampon
and tampon, between slipping in slop
and sleeping in slips, between my fine
Thai pie and your pine-white thigh.
Next thing it was the 4th of July
and it was okay to say okay,
sahibs out-nabobbing bwana bossmen,
even cannibals adding their two cents
to a vernacular fit for kings and fools.
Sometimes when I forget how to tell coots
from cooties or Keats from Shelley
I remember that in New Zealand a kina
is a purple shellfish you buy
at the market, a sea urchin
in yankee doodle speak, not the
same thing as New Guinea's *kina*,
the doughnut-shaped coin worth a buck,
and that the sea urchin's mouth
is called Aristotle's lantern,
proving that no matter where you go,
there you are, surrounded by language
as near to your face as air itself,
sometimes warm, sometimes cold,
growing like fingernails
even after your death.

BOUQUET

Constance Joan Bovier

The minute I walked into Jeff 'n Jerry's I spotted her in a booth all the way to the back, past the bar and the pool tables. And there was this guy sitting next to her, a guy in a suit. I had half a mind to turn around, go get in my truck and leave.

I remembered I was about out of dog food and the feed store was only a couple of blocks away. With two German shepherds, you need a lot of dog food. But Lori had spotted me. I knew if I left she'd just call later wanting to know why. She wasn't the kind to let things alone. And she'd probably figure I left because of the guy.

Anyhow, I checked my watch and saw it was already six-twenty. The feed store closed at six-thirty. So I figured I'd go ahead and stay, get this thing with the photos behind me.

I started for their booth. Lori waved at me and leaned over to say something to the guy. I checked my jeans and shirt. They looked okay—one thing about working in parts, you stay pretty clean.

Somebody new was tending bar and I didn't know anybody on the pool tables. We used to be in here every weekend, Lori and me. I

guessed I hadn't been back since lunch about a year ago. A girl at the corner pool table was bent over her cue, frowning like Lori used to. Lori never gave up, even when she was playing lousy. She never gave up on much of anything. And I got to where I counted on that, I guess—her hanging in there, saying we could work things out. Till that day she looked at me and said, "Do you want a divorce? Is that what you're trying to say?" Well, she put me on the spot, all right. I'd been trying to backpedal ever since. But I couldn't see how this get-together would do any good. She hadn't said anything about somebody coming with her.

The guy in the booth had thinning hair and, sitting there, he looked shorter than her. I figured it must not bother Lori too much. There he was, right? She was wearing a red blouse that made her look good till her face started getting dark in splotches the way it always did when she was embarrassed.

Before I even got to the booth, the guy stood up and stuck out his hand.

"Allen," she said, "this is Howard."

I never could figure why she had to call me Allen. It never sat easy. Even the nametag on my shirt said Al. I knew who Al was. "Al," I told him and took his hand.

I figured on one of those soft, soggy handshakes but he had a dry hand and a pretty good grip. He said

something while we pumped our arms. I think it was his last name, but I didn't catch it.

I slid into the empty side of the booth and settled in the middle. He sat down next to Lori. Then he reached up and loosened the knot in his tie and unbuttoned the top button of his shirt. He did it with one hand like he'd done it a million times. The last time I remembered wearing a tie was to our wedding and then Lori tied it for me.

I grabbed the ashtray from the side of the booth and gave it a little spin. Well, who was going to say what first?

"I haven't been here in a year," Lori said.

Okay, I figured I could handle some chit-chat. "Best seafood in town," I said.

Then he did his part. "That's what Lori tells me."

She said he was new to town. That he did something for a living that sounded like a lot of martini lunches. That she met him when he did some consulting for the company where she worked.

Great.

"Lori tells me that you can fix anything that goes wrong with a car."

I didn't feel like talking to this guy about my work. I shrugged, started to say something. But right then the waitress came along with our menus and silverware and what did we want to drink? I ordered a Coors. Howard asked for mineral water. Two. Lori smiled at him and the waitress. Since when did she give up beer?

I gave the menu the once over. There wasn't anything new, which was fine. I wanted the combo anyway.

"What do you two recommend?" he said.

You two. Well, if that's how it was, why were Lori and me sitting here with a year and a table between

us, and him over there by her? They went into a huddle, with Lori pointing out things on the menu. "I'm not much for oysters," he said.

Waiting for them to finish, I spotted the photo album on the seat beside her. I opened my menu again and thought about switching to oysters till the waitress came back and took our order.

After that the guy picked up with cars again, didn't miss a beat. So I talked some about what I did—at least what I'd been doing up until last month.

"I hear you're heading up the parts department now." Lori was using that bouncy voice she always put on for company or when she was trying to keep a conversation "flowing."

I didn't feel like *flowing*. And I sure didn't feel like getting into my damned-if-you-do promotion. Sometimes I missed being under the hood of a car so much it was almost as bad as the way I felt after Lori'd moved out of the house.

Well, pretty soon, we covered the weather and what was going on at her job and she got around to the photos.

She picked up the album and held it out across the table. I had my beer in one hand and the other hand in my lap. When I didn't reach out right away, she laid it down by my silverware.

"I'm sorry this took so long. I just couldn't handle it at first, you know..." She glanced up.

"No problem."

The photos were her deal anyway. The day we had lunch here, when she signed the divorce papers, she was already talking about how I ought to have a record of our marriage. I kept trying to tell her not to bother, but she wouldn't let up. She just didn't get it—that it wasn't a *record* I wanted.

The waitress brought our food. The guy got up to take off his coat

and for a minute he just stood there with it in his hand, looking at their side of the booth and at the empty seat beside me. I could have offered to take it. He finally hung it on the back of a chair at an empty table.

He had catfish. Lori had her old standby, shrimp. He kept saying how good the food was. I think he overdid it a little. When he said something for about the third time, Lori caught me looking at her and she blushed again.

I was working on my combo—the stuffed crab wasn't as good as I remembered—and shoving a clump of parsley around the platter. Lori was the only person I ever knew who bought parsley on purpose. She put it on everything she ate and I always gave her mine in restaurants. I was still looking at it when the guy cleared his throat. "Has Lori told you about our plans yet, Al?"

I could tell she wasn't ready for this. Her head snapped in his direction. He looked confused.

I put my fork down. And there was that parsley. That day during lunch, I'd given mine to Lori like always. I'd kept the envelope of papers on the seat till it was almost time for us both to get back to work. I kept talking about how empty the house was with just me and the dogs. I figured the way she listened, the way she kept looking so hard at my face that she could tell what I wanted, that she wouldn't sign. But when I laid the papers on the table, she did. In the parking lot afterward, she drove off crying.

What did it take anyway? Lori always claimed she never knew how I felt about anything. Do you have to come right out and tell somebody you think you're dying?

So there was this parsley. I looked at it. I picked it up by the stem like a bouquet. It drooped a little. I hadn't thought what the heat from the platter would do to it. But I was already holding it and Lori was looking at

it. So I reached across the table and put it on her plate.

Then we all looked at it. The guy cleared his throat again. Lori pulled her napkin up out of her lap and covered her mouth.

After a while, he took a drink of his mineral water and started poking his fork at his food, making little clinking noises.

Lori stared at the parsley.

My hands clenched and my right arm lifted from the table. I wanted to slam my fist down, bounce their mineral water six feet into the air. What did it take anyway? I reached out and grabbed the salt and pepper shakers, slid them across the table until they cracked into the wall. The salt fell over and spilled out onto the table. I left it there.

"Well, I'm out of here," I slid out of the booth. "Time to feed the dogs."

"The *dogs*." Lori was back to bouncy. "How *are* they?"

I didn't feel like answering.

The guy stood up fast, caught his napkin before it slipped to the floor and stuck out a hand. "Glad to meet you, Al."

I reached for my wallet.

He pulled his hand back, gave a little wave. "Let us take care of it. Really."

I pulled out a twenty and tossed it onto the table.

"Later."

"Allen, the *pictures*."

I looked at the photo album. I thought about leaving it right there. But I picked it up.

She called out something as I walked away. The blood was rushing around in my head so loud I didn't hear what she said. I walked straight to the front of the restaurant, the album dangling from my hand like a chunk of cement. I spotted the trash can by the door. It was one of the easiest things I'd ever done. I just reached out my arm and dropped the album into the trash on my way out the door.

The minute I did it, I felt lousy. But it was too late. Lori'd probably seen it all.

Outside, I climbed into my truck, swearing. I figured the thing to do was pull over to the gas station next door where I could park on the far side of a van so they wouldn't see me. That way I could go back in after they left.

I didn't have long to wait. When they came out the door, he had his arm around her. I saw that Lori was a good two inches taller, even all hunched over like she was. I figured they'd get into the BMW parked by the door. But they crossed the lot to a black Blazer. That's when I saw what she was holding up against her chest. I should've known. What made me think she'd leave the photo album in the trash?

She looked all around the parking lot, but she didn't see me. My hand was on the door handle and I came *that* close to jumping out and hollering at her.

Then the guy, Howard, opened the door for her and went around the other side of the Blazer to get in. They sat there. I could see their heads moving, Lori's arms waving, then him putting his arms around her. Finally, they drove off.

I don't know how long I sat there before I peeled out of the gas station. I just drove around town for a while that night before I headed home to feed the dogs, hearing the record of our marriage—*you blew it Al you blew it Al you blew it Al you blew it*—playing over and over in my mind.

Karen Dale
WATCHING THE MOON

Damage from a bad marriage, like that from chronic insomnia, can be difficult to measure. It begins as depletion often remedied with a pot of good coffee. You manage to appear organized and sincere most of the time, to remember where the children are and when to pick them up. Lapses, usually minor, are excused by anyone who suspects your uneasy state, unnoticed by those who do not. One morning you wake to burnt out acreage, a blackened dreamscape, the sky a tent of white smoke. You thought you watched the moon last night, all night, as it fell and fell. Surely you would have fled the fire that raged here, or died in it.

THE MAD HOUSE

Scott Wilson

The Lawyer family had a place called the Mad House. David and I played in the Mad House when it rained. We played checkers and smelled the musty smell of the camas roots, which were left drying on a small table by the door. The room had an old iron bed and a pot belly stove.

The Mad House was the width of the bed and was actually part of the barn. It was built at a time and in a part of town in Lapwai that had barns because it was against the hill. No one owned the hill because it was too steep to farm, so people let their horses graze free on the hill. I don't remember if they were Appaloosas, but I'd like to think they were.

In the barn Corbett kept the firewood. He split the rounds right in the barn. He must've been pretty old because he was David's grandpa and I called him Grandpa, too. I remember him looking old because his skin was the soft caramel color of old Nez Perce, with the absolute smoothness of a worn stone at the bottom of a river. You wanted to touch that face, it looked so smooth.

I believe Grandpa built the Mad House because of Mrs. Lawyer. I never knew Mrs. Lawyer's first name. She spent most of the time in

her bedroom in the house. She was grumpy from illness and cataracts and I only remember Mrs. Lawyer speaking when she told David and me to be quiet or not to slam the door.

Mrs. Lawyer was not Nez Perce but Sioux. On top of that drawback, she married into a family that had not been very popular with the rest of the tribe since 1864. That was when David's great, great grandfather, The Lawyer, signed a treaty on behalf of the whole tribe. Most of the town felt Chief Lawyer sold out. I don't think Mrs. Lawyer was very happy.

So Mrs. Lawyer was either in her room in the big house or in the Mad House where, she said, "I can be in charge." I would have preferred to be in the Mad House. I loved the smell of the roots, the feel of the wood stove heat, and the sound of rain on the tin roof. I don't know if Grandpa spent much time in the Mad House. He was outside a lot, and we got to talk to him. He was a lot of fun. David and I would ride to Lewiston in the back of his pickup, covered by a canvas tarp. He kidded me a lot. Once, when I got a new puppy, he said it would be ready to eat pretty soon.

I went to see Grandpa when he was 84. He thought I was an Indian agent and it was 1920. He was a tribal policeman then, keeping Indi-

ans away from whiskey. David and I used to play with his official seal.

I don't have anything to remind me of playing with David when I was ten. Corbett died when I was in college. I went to the funeral. Mrs. Lawyer had died earlier. It just happened and I didn't know it. The family was glad that I came, but it was very sad. The old Nez Perce women wore long, loose flowered dresses, which they sometimes wore with a shawl at war dances. I'd hear them speaking Nez Perce together at the post office. That was where I heard Nez Perce spoken most often. I think I could recognize the sounds as Nez Perce if I heard them today.

It was very sad to be at the funeral because I had nothing to tie me

with the people there on that day. I noticed the strong clip of the Nez Perce accent when they spoke English. I was twenty then with long bright red hair (Grandpa nicknamed me Redwing). When I was ten, it was easy to talk because it was about finding rattlesnake skins on the rock that's shaped like a chair on the hill. Or, "Will you feed the cat, Redwing, while we go to South Dakota?" Now I am going to go in a direction away from my neighbors. What I would do would have very little to do with the Nez Perce. But I think of them always and when I hear drums I almost run to stand closer to the sound and shuffle my feet and chant very low like Grandpa did while he split firewood.

FLESH AND BONE

Chris Farnsworth

Cynthia asks for a rest stop, so Kirby pulls over to the side of the road. There is nothing but desert for miles. Cynthia gets out, walks around. Kirby opens his door, lets in the clean hot air, and looks out at the horizon.

Kirby thinks of ReBuilt and wonders what it would be like, sometimes. To have your body taken, like his was, on the road... He's known, for a long time, that he could die. There are a thousand ways for his truck to fail and betray him. The brakes could give out on an incline, or they could lock on a corner, or he might not be paying attention, going too fast, and negotiations could break down between him and a turn. Whatever it might be, the result would be the same: he would be hurled out of his safe, solid truck into a world not gentle with flesh, to collide with asphalt and gravity.

It comes to him in dreams, or just strikes him as he's driving. The feeling never changes. He feels the glass of his windshield give way like a flimsy curtain, but the impact, unseen and invulnerable, pushes his ribs back into the organs they are meant to protect, tears his face back from his skull, and his neck snaps,

collapsing into itself like a cheap spring. And then he is lying on a desolate godforsaken road somewhere unable to move, but still feeling everything, and so busted up it would take 24 x-rays for each body part just to begin to tell what's been broken. And then the vultures start to circle, and he can still feel everything.

Kirby wonders what it would be like, to have your body taken from you like that.

And then he sees Cynthia, stretching, pulling her body taut in the sun like a cat, getting out the cramps from hours of sitting. Even under his baggy jeans and baggy t-shirt, the perfection of her young body shines through. It's the kind of flawlessness that must drive all those people in health clubs back in civilization. All those body-nazis, grunting and sweating and straining, trying to achieve what Cynthia has, a mostly unearned prize won in the genetic crap shoot.

It reminds Kirby that he is not so young anymore himself. His body is already starting to betray him. There are small signs. A little more hair caught in the drain of the shower. It takes him longer to recover from binges, two or three days sometimes. He is slower with the two-step between gas, brake and clutch. All these little indications that the process of dying has placed a quiet foot in him.

When you are young, Kirby thinks, your body seems like enough of a shelter itself. It can sleep just about anywhere, stay up all night, run, jump, fuck, do whatever you ask of it without complaint. When you are young, if you are lucky, you are not even aware of your body; it just works. All these little signs keep telling him that he's not so young anymore. Pretty soon, he's going to have to start taking care of his body. instead of vice-versa. He's going to have to find a place for it, feed it properly, make sure that it is warm and safe in the night, even give it medicine and care sometimes. And all he has, right now, is this truck.

Kirby once held a job with a fraudulent diet aids company when he was (as usual) unemployed as a trucker. The company moved from small town to small town throughout the West, taking Kirby with them, his truck safely parked at a lot in Oregon where he first met the weight-hucksters.

The salesman, a greasy slicked-back man who looked like a game-show host, first took a picture of Kirby and then made two prints. The first he blew up with the help of a computer so that Kirby looked to be three hundred or so pounds. The second he left alone, except to mark it "AFTER." These photos he distributed on flyers throughout the targeted town, advertising a meeting where the overweight could learn about a new "miracle diet."

And they came. Like herds of fat pilgrims to a religious shrine, they came to the meeting, usually held in a community center or the local YMCA. The salesman would hold up a bottle or wave a diet plan and give his spiel that promised a slim and trim body without eating less or exercising. Kirby's job at these meetings was to eat. The salesman would point to him at a table piled high with cakes, pizzas, hamburgers, french fries, Twinkies, sandwiches,

pies, all the delicacies that make life worth living to a calorie addict. Kirby would stuff himself while the salesman barked, "And if you don't believe me, ask that young man there. Thanks to the Miracle-Loss Diet Pill, this boy lost 500 pounds, and still eats what ever he wants! Look at him tuck it away!" Kirby would look up, smile and wave, and go back to cramming food in his face.

The crowd, their eyes gleaming at the pile of food Kirby was consuming, would then reach in their pockets, and pay the salesman whatever he asked for a bottle of sugar pills. As soon as they had all gone back to their homes to sleep and dream of waking up beautiful, the salesman, his assistants, and Kirby would gather up their stuff and leave town fast, before the fat people would wake and find that they still were trapped in their fleshy bodies. Then it was on to the next town.

Although it was a good job—the pay was great and Kirby had never been so well-fed in his life—he quit after a month. He started to feel sick, watching the bovine hope in their victims' eyes, the way they stared at him as he scarfed down chocolate shakes and ice cream. All his life, Kirby had never really been satisfied with the way he looked. He always thought he was too skinny, remembered times when he could not play football because he couldn't make the weight limit. Words like scrawny, wimp, and puny always carried a special sting for him. And now he had to face these round, double-chinned faces turned to him, because they wanted to look like he did. They wanted to be like him. They never asked him if the "miracle cure" worked—they regarded his skinny body with too much reverence to actually approach him—but looked to him as an article of faith and hope.

After they plunked down their cash, took the pill, Kirby imagined,

they went back to their trailer homes and ordered a dozen Domino's pizzas, or opened a couple "Glutton Man" frozen entrees and popped them in the microwave, secure in the knowledge they could do no wrong, because Kirby had granted them the ability to eat without guilt. Kirby's overactive brain pictured fat people eating so much they exploded, or worse, fat people starving themselves to death when they discovered the miracle cure was a fraud, losing even the will to eat. He pictured them in their dimly lit homes, watch-

ing TV, wasting away, always alone.

Kirby packed his duffel, took his last cut of the pay, and hitchhiked back to Oregon and his truck. It took him three days, but he did not stop for meals, just water. He noticed his gut began to grow a little with all of the food he had eaten.

It makes him wonder what some people would do for a body like Cynthia's.

She hops back in the cab, her fatigue gone, eyes bright. Kirby closes his door and they start driving again.

Richard Paul Schmonsees
THE NIGHT LAMP

The night bird stunned by
its lone voice on the wires
in the yard, the japanese
wind chimes striking
together like bones
in my fingers. I am suffocated
in the hot stillness as
a neighbor closes his cellar
door, the scraping sound as if
history closing down on top of me.
I staple myself to the sheets.
I see my father's face
reflected back at me
by the lamp of the night
whispering that I did not
love him, my heart heavy as
a dark candy rolling
out of the bed into
the poor dog's mouth.
Finally, I am on the ship
of sleep, my room filling
with water, the slight creak
of the room the temperature of
blood, the cavity of the chest
opening like raven wings
to emit a dream whisper.
The night is screaming back,
"Love someone, anyone,"
making that music that
drives my bones mad.

Michael A. Arnzen
MORNING GROWTH

Wife says she hates that nasty
hair in the sink
peppering the porcelain
like stippled lines of ink
impossible to wash out
'cause it sticks to the skin
of the basin as if glued there.
But I shave it off daily.
And it still insists on growing
a stiff bit each day
like tiny pinheads popping up
awaiting the razor
and I don't know how
to tell Wife
that it's not my fault
that our sink is alive.

DEPARTMENT


 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 literary entertainment. The magazine is staffed entirely by English and English Education majors—undergraduate and graduate—presently attending the University, and this issue has been funded by the ASUI and the support from local merchants. A single issue of *FUGUE* is only \$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—the manuscript will not be returned. 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 more 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.

☐ **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 genres—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. In some cases, we may contact a contributor for a re-write,

clarification of text, or notification of necessary editorial changes.

☐ **Stories:** These must be complete and concluded, with good characterization and plotting. You must make the reader *feel* without resorting to clichés. 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 7000. Book excerpts, chapters, and serializations will not be considered. Payment is \$10-\$20 according to length.

☐ **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 \$30.

☐ **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.

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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 and up.

☐ **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.

