fugue

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fugue

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Editor's Notes

Ever wonder at those times when Joe Montana led the 'Niners to a game-winning touchdown with only seconds left in the fourth quarter? If you weren't paying attention, if you got caught up in the moment, the task seemed so easy that you believed you could do the same thing. You actually convinced yourself that, perhaps with a little more working out and a little less Haagen-Daz, you could strap on the helmet and pads and drive for the winning score.

That is, if you were *not* paying attention. If you were, you realized something--several things, actually: that guy out there was running awfully hard not to get hurt; despite his best efforts to avoid it, he was *still* getting hurt; this all should look easy--he was making more than I'll see in my life; he had been doing this a long time; and he knew the playbook and his players and how everyone on the field would react.

I, over the last ten months or so, have learned these same lessons in regards to editing a literary magazine. It's not easy. It's not something you do with Sally Struthers by correspondence; it's not a hobby. It is a very serious business. Well, maybe not that serious--it is also a lot of fun--but it demands most of what you have and some of what you don't. You deal with great people who love the same things you love (most of the time) and you put off everything in your life for days at a time to see your magazine come together. The work of a literary magazine, regardless of size or stature or quality, is doing holy work. It is dissemination. It amounts to flogging yourself with the rotted intestines of bears.

I've had to learn all of this because Eric Isaacson, the beatified former editor of *Fugue*, stepped aside in January and gingerly tossed me the reins. Eric has been around for a long time and has worked with *Fugue* for as long as I can remember. But, in the interest of saving his marriage and ensuring that his girls don't fall to a life of crime, he asked me to move into place as the new editor.

Piece of cake, I thought to myself. Not that Eric didn't work hard, not that he didn't do great things for the magazine. But Eric fooled me--all of us in the department--a bit. He had been at this so long that he made it all look nearly effortless. The system was set, the lines were drawn, the wheels turned.

So when I took over as editor, I thought that things would just seem to move with the kind of ease that my predecessor had possessed. This was not the case. I was in for a great deal more than I had ever anticipated. For the better, mostly. Some for the worse. But I wouldn't trade a thing, although it wouldn't be so bad if I were Joe Montana, either.

Thanks and appreciation and sincere, editorial, Platonic (more or less) love goes out to the following people or groups:

Ron McFarland and the *Fugue* staff, without which. . .
The University of Idaho and the Department of English for generous funding now and in the future;
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Jennifer McFarland for putting up with me, putting me up to things, putting her arms around me;

And, naturally, **YOU!** Without writers, contributors, and readers, none of this would be worth anything. So carry on. And we'll do the same.

Mary Winters

The Ironing Board

There is only one & it passes from hand to hand.
If you catch sight of it, duck — it flies.
Its top is so soft — Jesus's swaddling clothes
anchored beneath with magical metal X's & it is
scorched like the Shroud of Turin.

The screech of its legs unfolding has
inspired the greatest of music, also insanity.
Its design is perfect, eternal, needing neither
addition nor subtraction any more than what it
resembles: the great blue heron or Bactrian camel.

The ironing board is a citizen of no country,
it pays homage to no one. It would exist
even if the iron disappeared because as with the
picnic table, people will always want an object
in which to get their legs hopelessly entangled.

The board has played a pivotal role in history:
as the battering ram at the Battle of Hastings.
As a stretcher it carried corpses down from Everest;
it walked on the moon. In everyday life the man
who dropped it in the middle of a busy intersection

was shielded by it from the ensuing twenty-car
pile-up. The ironing board is *nothing at all*
like its cousin the mangle, which exists
only to sever the arm of a beautiful nun
laundering lepers' sheets in the tropics.

Gutter Work

Saturday morning, quarter past six, Abbie is on my front porch, assaulting the door. His fist thumps away, nearly rattling the door off its hinges, as if providing rhythm to the squawking buzz of the doorbell. He's ambidextrous when it comes to making a general nuisance of himself.

His real name is Franklin, but my girlfriend and I call him Abbie on account of the fact he resembles Abbie Hoffman. He has a wild mess of curly hair that pokes out at weird angles, and his face looks as though it sees a razor once or twice a week at the most.

Abbie's the local eccentric, a middle-aged man who lives down the street in a large house he shares with his mother and her half dozen or so Persian cats. The scuttlebutt has it that Abbie's mother is supposed to be wealthy, hoarding the inheritance left by her husband when he keeled over from a coronary.

"Morning," Abbie says as I unhook the chain and ease open the door. "I was wondering if you wanted your gutters cleaned."

"Right now?" I ask.

I notice that he's taken the privilege of parking an extension ladder against the front of my house, along with a new box of trash bags and a coil of garden hose. He doesn't really work, just putters around the neighborhood mowing lawns, muttering to himself and trying to fix things no one wants him to touch. He's a nice enough guy, but not the sort of person you'd want hanging around your home.

"Sure," he replies. "There's a storm front supposed to be blowing in from Texas tonight or tomorrow, so I figured I'd see if I couldn't help folks get ready. Your gutters might be clogged. I see where the water's splashed over the side."

He angles his head toward an oval patch on the edge of the porch where the paint has flaked away. The boards

are weathered and bowed, swelling into a distressed mound.

"Look, it's early," I say. "I was asleep. Most people are at this time. Maybe this isn't the best part of the day to go round knocking on everyone's doors."

"Oh. Hey, I'm sorry about that. But since you're up now, what do you say? I could climb up and take a look, see what kind of shape the gutters are in. You want, I'll scoop them out for you. I could knock that out for about twenty-five bucks."

"Look, Franklin, I don't think so. This really isn't a good time for me." I yawn and rub my eyes, hoping he'll take the hint and mosey along.

"If money's the problem, you can pay me later," he says. "Next week, whenever. Say, twenty dollars, I'll clean the gutters and rinse them out good as new. You won't have any problems with spillage once I get done."

"Here's the deal," I tell him. "I'm supposed to be the one who does all the work around the house. I'd like to be able to hire you to do this, but the truth is my girlfriend won't let me. You know how that is, right? She'd get pissed if I hired someone to do my job. Besides, we just rent the place. You'd have to see Carlson about something like this."

Pete Carlson is my landlord. He lives across the street, two houses up. Carlson should be the one dealing with this raving lunatic. It's not my responsibility.

"Tell you what," he says, sounding like a used-car salesman trying to pitch his way around a low offer. "I'll give you time to think about this, give you a chance to talk it over with your woman, and then I'll swing by this afternoon if I'm not too busy."

"Sure thing," I tell him, gesturing toward my landlord's house. "But you ought to see Carlson first."

"Let me give you one of my cards," Abbie says as I start to close the door.

He reaches into his pocket and draws out a stack of business cards — not the sort you'd have printed up at Kinko's, just a few three-by-five index cards he'd clipped in half. On the blank side he'd written *Franklin LaRue, handy-*

man, and below that his telephone number. I am surprised to see that he has beautiful penmanship. It looks as though he'd used a calligraphy pen.

"I'll call you if I need to," I say.

"You want my pager number if I'm not home?"

"You have a pager?" I ask.

He nods, looking down at his toes once again. "My mama bought it for me so she'd be able to reach me if she falls down and breaks her hip again. She did that last March and was stuck in the bathroom until I got back from my errands. My mama was getting out of the tub when she slipped."

Trying to shake that image out of my mind, I wonder how his mother will be able to reach a telephone if she takes a spill and fractures her hip. Maybe she has a cell phone tucked into the housecoat she keeps wrapped around her.

Abbie repeats the number a couple times, then asks if I want to write it down. I tell him I'll remember it long enough until I can find a pen. "Like I said, I'll call you if I need your help," I say. "Thanks for stopping by."

I close the door, and then watch as he slings the hose around his shoulder and carries his ladder and trash bags to the house next door.

"Who was that?" Marisa asks as I climb back into bed.

I place Abbie's card on top of my clock radio. "Just the Ab-man. He wanted to clean our gutters."

"Kind of early, isn't it?"

"He didn't seem to think so," I reply. "He's over at the Guthries' house now, trying to rouse them."

"That man's a loon," Marisa says, rolling over into her nest of pillows.

I suppose every neighborhood has its own resident kook, someone who skirts the fringes of sanity. Abbie is ours. In the few months Marisa and I have been living here, I've had maybe three conversations with Abbie. Usually, I just see him out mowing his yard or walking around muttering to himself. A few of our neighbors have given us differ-

ent versions of why he's the way he is, ranging from Fetal Alcohol Syndrome to a traumatic experience in Vietnam. Most of them just say he's nuts and leave it at that.

f f f

Marisa's father stops by early in the afternoon. He gives the doorbell a few gratuitous nudges, then walks on in the house. "You know there's some fool up on your roof?" Hector asks.

"Yeah, I know. That's Abbie Hoffman. He's trying to clean out the gutter."

"The hippie? I thought he was dead."

"Actually, that's just some guy who lives around the corner. He thinks he's the local handyman, takes it upon himself to decide when we should all have work done on our homes."

Hector makes a grunting noise. "Sounds like a scam to me. What's his real name? He reminds me of that Unabomber fellow."

"His name's LaRue," I say. "He lives with his mother. They have that big house around the block. The one with the weird fence."

The LaRue place — a sprawling, tangled curiosity of a Queen Anne house that has been added to so many times most architects can only scratch their heads and take wild stabs at what it was supposed to look like — is surrounded by a four-foot limestone fence with shards of broken glass embedded in the top mortar. Like the house, the fence was erected in stages, so none of the stones match.

"That'd be Frank LaRue's boy," Hector tells me. "Yeah, I heard he was a little soft in the head. See, I knew old Frank. Had more money than he knew what to do with, but you wouldn't have a clue by looking at him. Always wore the same brown suit, looked like he cut his hair with a butcher's knife. Had a nice car, though. I suppose his widow must be up in her eighties by now."

"Your daughter is in the shower," I say. "Want me to tell her you're here?"

"I can't stay long," Hector replies, taking a seat at the

far end of the couch. "I was on my way over to the driving range and thought I'd drop in and see if you wanted to go smack a few balls with me. It's a nice day."

"Abbie says it's supposed to rain. That's why he wanted to clean the gutters."

Hector shrugs. "What is he, a meteorologist? Take a look outside, son, and tell me if that looks like rain to you."

There's a loud clomping noise as Abbie stomps around on the roof, followed by an even louder thump. A few seconds later I hear him cursing, and then a trash bag spills out onto the front lawn.

"That boy's going to break his neck," Hector says. "Better get him down before he hurts himself or tears up your roof. You have any idea what new shingles would cost these days?"

"He'll be all right," I say. "Besides, he should be done pretty soon. He's been up there more than an hour. It can't take much longer than that."

Marisa walks out of the bathroom with a towel wrapped around her waist and another one bundling up her hair in a makeshift turban. She sees her father sitting on the couch, then races across the hallway. A couple minutes later, she reappears, fully dressed and combing her wet hair.

"Hey, when did you get here?" she asks Hector.

"A few minutes ago," he says. "I thought I'd come over and watch that hippie kill himself falling off your roof."

"Is that what that noise was? I thought I heard something, but with the water running I couldn't be sure."

I get up to grab a Coke out of the fridge, and ask Hector if he wants a drink. He says he wouldn't say no to a beer if there's one to spare.

On my way back to the living room, I hear Marisa's blow dryer whining away. I duck my head in the room, then ask her to hurry, save me from having to talk to her father by myself. I like Hector well enough, but whenever I see him I know it's only a matter of time before he starts asking me when I'm going to find a decent job and make some real money.

"You know old man LaRue killed a man about forty years ago?" Hector says, popping open his beer. "Nothing ever came of it. Got hushed up pretty quickly, but everyone knew what happened. Was a colored boy he killed. Happened one night in Biloxi. Poor nigger stepped out in the street, right in the way of Frank LaRue's Cadillac. Put a good sized dent in that Eldorado. Sure was a nice car."

"That's terrible," I tell him.

I look out the window and see Abbie repositioning his ladder, dragging his garden hose up with him. Part of the hose is twisted around the bottom rung, and I watch him tug at it a few times, shaking the ladder.

"I'll be back in a minute," I tell Hector. "He's going to knock over his ladder if he's not careful."

Hector follows me out the door, probably to get a better view in case Abbie actually does manage to break his neck. I shout at Abbie, telling him to stop for a second so I can free up the hose.

"You're caught on the ladder," I explain. "Climb on up and then I'll hand it to you once I get it loose."

"I'm almost finished," he says. "All I got left to do is rinse out the gutters, make sure they're nice and clean."

Somehow he's twisted the hose several times around one of the supporting legs and once more around the lowest rung. I can't imagine exactly how he accomplished this.

Once I'm on the roof and give him the hose, I notice that Abbie is sunburned and sweating heavily. I ask if he's all right and if he needs a glass of water.

"Maybe you ought to go on home," I suggest. "This looks really good. I'm sure the gutters will be fine. You better get inside for a while before you have sunstroke."

"I'm O.K. Just let me make sure I did a good job."

"Looks fine to me. Why don't you go ahead and climb down?"

He looks at Hector, who is smiling at us. Hector seems perfectly amused.

"It's going to rain," Abbie says. "I can feel it in the air."

Hector and I both study the sky. The only clouds are full and white and fluffy.

"Looks that way," I lie. "Come on, you better get home before it starts."

"I don't want to leave a job until it's done. You sure this'll be all right?"

"Don't worry about it, Franklin."

There's a heady funk rippling off Abbie's skin, a mixture of grime and sweat and God knows what else. I stick my nose into the sleeve of my shirt, trying to snatch a couple fresh breaths. He smells worse than bad. Septic, almost. I consider hosing him down in the driveway, that is if I can ever manage to get him off the goddamn roof.

I hear the screen door creak open and then slam shut, and Marisa walks out and stands next to her father. She whispers to Hector and they both start laughing, giggling really, looking back up at Abbie and me standing on the roof. I pitch the garden hose off the roof, missing Hector and Marisa by half a yard or so. They both step back as it smacks against the grass.

"Let's go," I tell Abbie as I start backing down the ladder.

He doesn't respond, just examines his feet and starts flexing his toes.

Back on the porch, I hand Abbie a glass of iced tea and promise him that I'll tell my landlord about the good job he did. Carlson called this morning around ten-thirty, asking if we minded having Abbie work on the gutters. I couldn't think of a good enough reason to refuse, but now I remind myself to see Carlson first chance I get. I'm thinking we deserve a break on next month's rent, a reward for indulging Abbie all afternoon.

"You need anything else done around here, give me a call," Abbie says, taking a look around at the porch as if he's hoping to locate a few structural flaws. "You have my card."

"I have your card," I reply, and watch as he packs up his ladder and hose and the rest of his gear and starts to

clear out, walking uncertainly down the sidewalk.

At the end of the driveway, Abbie's stacked three Hefty bags, each filled halfway with clumps of leaves and dirt and anything else that's washed down the roof over the past several months. This is the first time the gutters have been cleaned since we've lived in the house, probably the first time they've been cleaned in years.

f f f

The rain started around seven, a few light sprinkles before erupting into a full-blown shower. It's hardly the storm Abbie promised, but it has potential. Marisa and I listen to the rain tap on the roof and the hollow, gurgling sound it makes as it spews through the gutters. A breeze rattles through the blinds, spraying water across the window sill.

Marisa reaches for the window, ready to shut it, and I ask her to wait a few minutes. I like the way rain smells, and I breathe in the fresh scent as it washes through the room. A peal of thunder rolls in the distance, followed by the sizzling crack of lightning. It sounds like an electric bullwhip snapping across the horizon. Pulling Abbie's card from my back pocket, I gaze at the ceiling where a leak has browned the plaster and think about giving him a ring.

neighbor

here
is a rake—
they've drifted into my yard
—*your* leaves—
they've drifted from your trees—
you'll plainly see we have no trees,
that our lawn is neat and clean
—yours is a disgrace—
pick them up—
they are your leaves
from your trees

they are leaves
they are trees
here is your rake

paranoia incarcerates itself

if, by the tiniest intricacies of smell,
i could tell things, like my cat—a mother,
with two good eyes—who smells so well
she won't recognize her own child, the same
black-ball of fur that went to the vet. she hisses it
away, and scratches at it like an enemy,
because the kitten smells, i guess,
like the vet.

if i could tell by such intricacies of smell
about you, and where you've been—the mysteries
i cannot solve, that in questioning would offend—
certain men you just happen to know, certain times
i couldn't be there, and you knew when
i would be there—those certain, unexplained hours.

if i could smell that well, what things i might know
every time my nose runs across the tight, smooth
of your neck, the collar of your shirt, your hair, your arms
and your legs—things that could be easily fleshed-out
into stories—the self-same stories that hint at me now—poor,
proofless
hints i suspect might be true, whispering in my ear
that you are not my own.

The Long Way Back to Her Bedroom

She is asleep. Something pushes against her legs. An animal trying to get into the tent, she sleep-thinks, one more hungry raccoon. She turns, exaggerates her squirming to chase it away. It stops for a minute but then comes back at her, stronger, faster. Desperation. She opens her eyes. She sees neon 3:43, a table, a lamp. This isn't her tent. It's her bedroom. Her apartment. She pushes herself up onto her elbow to see what is nudging her. The sheet slides down, exposing her naked breasts to the man in her bedroom. He is half-in, half-out of the window that runs alongside her bed. She looks right at him. He is a faceless eclipse of the streetlight beaming into her room, but she can feel his eyes on her like cold metal on her skin. The millimoment freezes: her mind speaks he is coming in; I am naked. Her body responds: every muscle clamps, adrenaline shoots; vacuumed lungs suck air. She screams and terrifies herself with the sound of it, her voice like a terrible explosion that will not stop. The panic surges now and she cannot stop screaming, her eyes still fixed on his shadow-face. She feels his gaze, his considering heavy and long while she screams. Then he runs and she sees him go, but she is filled now with the terror of it and she has no choice but to scream. She runs to the window screaming, slams it, locks it, screaming, runs through the whole apartment, slamming, locking, screaming, shaking, screaming, screaming, screaming.

f f f

There is a man in her bedroom. Her father, uninvited. The phone rang. She heard him answer it. And then her doorknob was turning and the door was opening and there stood her father, looking.

She is naked and she is thirteen. Thirteen and naked. Caught between bathrobe and underwear. Her father is looking. She folds over to hide her fuzzy triangle; she

wraps her arms across her pointy buds. She crouches behind the bed. "Dad! Get out!" she says.

"The phone is for you," he says, still looking.

"Dad!" she says, louder, shorter.

"Well here, take it," he says. He holds the phone out to her.

"DAD—GET—OUT!" she yells. It scrapes the inside of throat.

"Oh calm down, for Christ sake," he yells back at her before he shuts the door.

She stays there, squatting on the floor, rocking back and forth, for a long time. Small and closed in and holding herself tight.

f f f

Her grandfather is in her bedroom. His bedroom actually. He sleeps in here because his snoring keeps her grandmother awake. She used to sleep with her grandmother but from now on she will be sleeping in here, in the other twin bed beside her grandfather. She doesn't know why. She wonders if she snores, too, or kicks her grandmother in her sleep.

She feels weird to be sleeping in the same room with a man, even if it is her grandfather. Her mother's words come back to her: *all men think about is sex. They can't help it. They're just made that way.* She wonders if that includes grandfather-men as well.

Her grandfather is sitting on the edge of her bed and has both hands along either side of her, squeezing her tight. She looks up into his face. He is smiling, but she wants to cry. The space between her legs keeps clenching as if she has to go the bathroom. She yells at herself, tells herself she is being silly. She has spent every weekend with Pap Pap since she was two and she is ten now. It makes no sense to be scared.

Nothing was different about today, she thinks. He took her to the coffee shop and bought her two jelly filled donuts and a Coke while he talked to his friend Abe who only has two fingers on his left hand. He took her to K-Mart and

bought her a Shawn Cassidy album. After dinner he went up to Dairy Queen and bought her a hot-fudge sundae with nuts and two cherries. She sat on his lap and held his tickets when they watched the Daily Number and he didn't win. Typical Saturday.

But this is a new bed and from here, in the shadow of the hallway light, she hears her mother's voice again and looks up, not at her Pap Pap anymore, but a man. A sex-crazed man who peers down at her with shadowed-eyes and whose arms lock her in like bars and whose sinister grin makes her clench between her legs.

f f f

There is a man in her bedroom. But she is asleep. She feels pushing against her legs and thinks it is an animal trying to get into the tent. She turns. It stops for a minute but then comes back at her, a stronger and faster push. Desperation. She opens her eyes. She sees neon 3:43 on the table. She pushes herself up on her elbow and a hand flies from out of the darkness and clamps tight over her mouth, driving her teeth into her lips, pushing her back down onto the bed. She smells stale alcohol, pot. Then she sees him, his face only inches from hers. But the streetlight beams through the window behind him and she cannot find his eyes. She feels his eyes on her, though, like cold metal on her skin. He laughs. Only then, when she hears his voice, does the terror come, exploding from its deep, protected place inside her. It freezes her stiff, every muscle clamps, her throat desert, full of dry silence. Something rips—tape from a roll—then it is over her mouth and he is cutting it with a knife. A knife. As if he can read her mind he waves it in front of her eyes; it gleams in the street light. He hovers above her then, and she sees his eyes. Two tiny pebbles that bob and shake in a sea of bloody threads and milky white. He laughs again. She gags on the vomit that stings her throat, but she cannot scream.

He has rope. He ties her left hand to her left ankle, right to right. Later he stretches her out like an X and ties her to the bed. At some point she is tied to him, she thinks. She tries to take her mind somewhere else, she tries to pray, but she can-

not forget her body. She feels every graze of his lips, every suck, every bite, every bruising squeeze, every dry jab into her vagina. She never moves. Not even a groan comes out of her although terror rages inside her, every last cell a flaming scream.

She stops writing, puts the pen down, leans back from the table. The apartment is flooded with light, so much brighter now in the middle of the night. She waits for the relief she thought she'd feel knowing all the pictures were outside of her on the page. Instead more come, more possibilities of horror, waking nightmare now. How far can she go? How far will she have to go before it stops?

He rips her apart first with his fucking, then with his knife. He cuts her face first. She feels the thin, gliding blade, the releasing pressure, the slice. She smells the warm metalness of her blood, feels it dripping down her cheeks, pooling in her ears, but she cannot scream. Then he slides the knife to her breasts. He circles her nipples with the tip of the blade. He stabs; he stabs again, again. Each thrust pushes her deeper into the fire. She travels the flames, the millions of flames deeper and deeper into their center until he takes a breast, one clean, final slice, and she escapes. Faints away into the black freedom. She does not feel him take the other. Does not feel his knife in her navel, tearing through her to carve her pelvic bone clean. Does not see him leave, crawl out the window. Does not hear him laugh as he runs. Never screams.

f f f

There is a man in her bedroom, she hopes. After all these years, Jesus, for calm, for sleep. Tonight she closes her eyes, bedroom light on, pepper spray on the night stand.

She takes a deep breath and invites him into her bedroom. He comes, the gentle Jesus of her childhood who has blue eyes, blue like the bottom of a swimming pool. He is big and strong and has come to protect her, she knows, with the golden light that surrounds him, that shimmers from the very place his heart should be. Softly it pulses; darkness dissolves from the room.

She watches him sit on the edge of her bed as she sleeps. He runs his glowing fingers along her cheek, down her arm. He kisses her hair. Sparkling gems of blue tears float from his eyes and dance in the air around her. They form a dome above her and burst, all at once, a million lights cocooning her safe, enveloping her in his veil of love.

He smiles. He kisses her head once more, then he is gone. But the golden shimmering remains and she sleeps, peaceful, warm and easy.

f f f

Her brother Danny comes into her bedroom and practically throws his algebra book down on the bed, his frustration a safe mask for the tears that are way too uncool for a ninth grader, and dangerous for a little guy like Danny who's already too short and too thin and all wobbly like a wet noodle.

She puts her own work aside and opens his book, his panic. She shows him how to factor the polynomials, making sure to say things like "Oh watch, you'll get it" and "Almost, but remember" when he's wrong. And then when he does figure it out, get his x's and y's and adding and multiplying all straight, she makes sure to get excited. "Yeah, exactly" and "See! You can do it."

When they finish, he curses out his math teacher, but there are no tears. And before he gets off the bed he thanks her. Just for a second, their eyes meet.

After he closes the door behind him, she sits and watches it for a while, releasing the tears she took from him, letting them stream silent into the crest of her smile.

f f f

There is a man in her bedroom, and any second now he will be in her bed. She doesn't really want to do this, but she's almost nineteen. Tired of being a virgin. And he wants to do it. He wants her, the first one ever. So she's decided. She'll do it.

She lies in the bed, flat on her back, her arms at her sides and her legs pressed tight to each other. Candle flames dance all around the room, *to create the mood,* her room-

mate Laurie said just before she left to sleep in a friend's room down the hall. Lavender, rose, vanilla, and pine wax, the scent of her freshly laundered sheets—they make the room smell like cheap air freshener. Her queasiness comes in waves.

She watches his outline as he undresses in the shadows of the flickering light. She made him turn around when she took her clothes off. He doesn't care if she watches; his bony knees and ankles, his flat, hairless chest. She closes her eyes when he takes off his underwear; she doesn't want to see his thing.

He sits down on the edge of the bed, then leans over and kisses her. He is garlic from the spaghetti they had for dinner and wine from the bottle his older brother bought them. Had he told his brother what they were doing? She panicked. No. He hadn't told anyone, just like he'd promised.

He lifts the sheet and she slides over, closer to the wall. He props himself up on his elbow and finally she looks into his eyes. She can feel how much he loves her, and that relaxes her a bit. He kisses her again, moves his hand across her chest, grazes her nipples. She shudders, his fingers too cold.

She closes her eyes and concentrates on his kisses, gentle and warm. So soft, the tip of his tongue playing. She wants to calm down. She wants to want this. He circles his fingertips around her breast, and she starts to tingle. Her hands move across his back, he moans.

He moves on top of her and she feels his thing hard between her legs. She thinks about it ripping her apart and then *No. Too much.* She bends her knees, raises her arms, he rolls off her. "I can't. I can't do it. I'm sorry," she says.

She gets out of the bed, finds her robe. He wants to talk but she says no. She doesn't want to be convinced. She doesn't want to do it and she doesn't want to hear that there's something wrong with her. She leaves the room. She hides in the bathroom on a toilet and sits for what feels like an hour to be sure he is gone. Then she goes back to

her room, lies down on Laurie's bed. She curls up on her side into a little tight ball. The candles still flicker.

f f f

There is a man in her bedroom and he snores. Like a bad muffler. Like a horse on its deathbed. Like he's coming with every breath. After six months, suddenly he's started snoring. Some nights she can laugh about it, sleep through it. Not tonight.

She jabs him in the shoulder. No "Honey, honey," tonight.

She jabs him again. This time he stirs. "What?" he mumbles.

"You're snoring," she says.

He turns on his side to face her, drapes his arm across her shoulders. "Sorry," he says, touching her cheek.

She looks at his quiet face. She knows he means it, and she wishes she hadn't woken him up. She wishes she could get used to his freight train snoring; she needs him here in her bedroom.

f f f

There's a man in her bedroom. But she is asleep. She feels something pushing against her and wakes up slowly, unconcerned. She opens her eyes and sees her alarm clock, 3:43. Then she turns her head a bit and finds herself staring at a man's face—a black ski mask. She realizes he has already pulled the sheet back to reveal her, naked already. She opens her mouth to scream. A hand clamps down over her but she screams through it. Someone will hear me, *she thinks.* Someone. *Then he raises his fist and punches her in the mouth. She tastes blood. He jams a rag into her mouth, presses a strip of duct tape across her face. He leans in close to her and laughs. Her muffled scream sounds miles away.*

"Go 'head and scream, sweetheart, no one will hear you now," he says.

And she does. She screams, she swings her arms, she kicks her legs everywhere as he tries to hold her down. But he is much stronger and he laughs when he finally rolls her on

her side and holds her arms tight enough to tape them together behind her.

He pushes her farther over on the bed, like he had been doing when she woke up. He stands next to her, a tall dark shadow. She hears him unzipping his pants and the sound is like a starter gun; she kicks her legs; tries to get up. He laughs and pushes her back, lies on top of her to keep her legs down. She fights, she fights the whole time. And she prays; habit makes the words she learned as a child. "Our Father, who art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done..."

Tears roll down into her ears, words swim in her head. His mouth is all over her face. He forces her legs apart with his knee; she kicks him. His hands squeeze her breasts like they are balls of putty. She feels him searching for her; she squeezes her eyes shut until she sees red. He shoots himself into her; a far-away screech shoots from her throat. He grates against her dry as he moves inside her. He rips her apart, a burning pain that slowly wears her down, chases the fight in her away. She is a rag doll with glassy eyes, flopping around with the force of his fuck.

Her mother interrupts her. "Anna, stop it. Stop doing this to yourself," she says.

She cries into the phone. "I can't Mom. I try. But I can't."

"Then we'll talk about something else. I went and saw Grandma today..."

She talks with her mother for a while, but the minute she is alone, she reads the rest of what she has written. Out loud, to herself, in the silence of her apartment:

He stays all night, spends her again and again. Sometimes she is there, smashed and splitting under him, sometimes she escapes. When she feels him get off the bed, she opens her swollen eyes and watches him crawl out her window and run. She lies there in the wake of the streetlight, too deadened to scream, too deadened to pray.

f f f

There is a man in her bedroom. He stands above her; only his face and shoulders reach beyond the high bars that surround her. A bright Winnie the Pooh mobile hangs there too, and the man waves a gray stuffed elephant at her, but she is mesmerized by his face. Then he speaks. "How's my little sweetheart? All ready for night-night?" he says. She knows him, the way he smells, the way he holds her, the way it feels when her bum rests in the bend of his elbow and her head lies in his hand and her body balances on his firm arm. She smiles at the man. He smiles and laughs too. He reaches to her; she wraps her hand around his outstretched finger. "There's my little peanut, yes, yes you are, my sweetie," he says. She sighs. She raises her other arm towards him. He smiles. He waves the elephant at her. She gurgles, she fusses; her elbows lock, she lifts her legs into the air. His eyes grow big; he creases his forehead; he waves the stuffed animal faster. "Oh, now don't cry, honey. Don't cry. Look at Mr. Elephant. Watch him dance." She cries. He steps back, waves the toy, scrunches his face more. She wails and chokes; her little arms and legs reaching, shaking. He stiffens, waves, creases, scrunches. Her eyes are swimming now; tears roll down into her ears. His face, Pooh Bear, Tigger, the gray elephant, all the animals just a marbled wash of color surrounded by melting bars.

f f f

There is a man in her bedroom. Well, what does she expect? She left the windows open and went to sleep. She didn't think about this being a ground floor apartment; her other places have always been up a few floors. She was an open invitation to anyone drunk or high, coming down desperate. Psychotic. This isn't, after all, Brady Bunch land. There's Jeffrey Dahmer. Drive-by shootings. Mass rape in Bosnia. She's almost thirty. She should know what the world is like. What was she thinking? What did she expect?

She didn't know. She didn't see the slivers of her soul buried in the center of her screams. She didn't know they were so full, contained so much, real and imagined. She doesn't know the difference now, but she raises herself to

meet each one, searching. Probing their faces for her missing eyes, for the eyes they have stolen from her, for the self she has lost amidst their whirling. She couldn't stop them from coming then, nor stop herself from following. She didn't know it would be such a long road back to her bedroom.

f f f

There is a woman in her bedroom; her name is Lydia. Anna has never done this before, although she's thought about it. A lot. She's masturbated with visions of being with women, but silly stuff like having Michelle Pfifer go down on her, Julia Roberts nibbling on her breasts. She's never been serious about it.

Lydia is beautiful. Long soft curls, firm and muscular arms and legs. She doesn't look much like a lesbian. Lydia knows Anna has never been with a woman; she says Anna will never want a man again.

Anna lies on her back, eyes closed. Lydia takes her feet, massages them, spreads Anna's legs. Lydia moves slow and soft, teasing her, coming in close and hard then pulling away, slowing down. She uses her hands, her tongue, so well and all at the same time that it feels like there is more than one of her there. Anna builds with desire; it rages inside her like nothing she's ever felt. She starts to come; her eyes fly open and she sees...a woman. Just like a switch, she's off. Lydia can tell something has happened. She looks up, her long hair cascading along her face, her eyes wide and flaming. Anna sighs. Apologizes. It's just not the same. She wants a man in her bedroom.

f f f

There is a man sleeping in her bedroom. She moves about the room as slowly as she can so she doesn't wake him up. No need for him to get up so early.

She's almost out the door when she hears his groggy voice. "Where are you going?"

"I'm going to shower in the other bathroom so you can sleep," she whispers.

"No, no. Stay here. I'm getting up anyway."

"But why? It's so early."

He reaches his arms out to her and she goes to him, sits on the edge of the bed. "I'm getting up cause you're leaving me for three weeks. I want to sit with you and have some coffee with you and look at you and memorize your face so when you're gone and I'm having my coffee alone I won't be so lonely."

She leans over to kiss him, wanting more than anything to crawl right back in bed beside him. "I love you, you know."

"Mmmm. I love you. And I'm going to miss you."

She cries in the shower, glad that it can still catch her. Grateful that she has a man like him in her bedroom.

f f f

There is a boy in her bedroom, her next-door neighbor Jack with the ice-blue eyes, whom *everyone* has a crush on, including Julie Morris, the only girl in the fifth grade who already has boobs. Anna knows this is proof God loves her.

Jack bends over her bed and picks up the little gray elephant she's had since she was a baby. She's embarrassed, not because the elephant's trunk is falling off again or because it is worn furless in most places, but simply because she has it, has these baby toys lying on her bed, the ruffled purple bedspread and matching canopy. No posters of the Bee Gees or Shawn Cassidy like Julie has, not even a radio.

Jack turns to her. "This is real pretty," he says, and she thinks he really means it. Then he looks down at his feet. "Will you let me kiss you?" he says.

Jack wants to kiss her. She doesn't want to be kissing anybody. Then she thinks about Julie Morris and the other girls at school. *He kissed you? Oh my God*, she hears. Then she hears her father's voice, below her window, out in the yard.

Jack darts past her without even a look. His footsteps tumble down the stairs, and she says it out loud, her stuffed elephant rolling across the top of the bed. "Yes," she says.

"Yes."

But in school that Monday she found out about the dare, Jack's punishment from Ben Hogan for the promised home run that he'd never hit. She told Julie Morgan and the others that of course she was going to say no, Jack and Ben and all their stupid games. Of course she knew it didn't mean anything.

f f f

There is a man in her bedroom. Steam rises behind him as he leaves the bathroom and collapses onto the bed beside her.

"Shit, what a day," he says, rubbing his face as if to erase his memory.

She looks up from her book at his bare rippled chest, the veins that push against his skin in his firm forearms. How did I get such a great body, she thinks to herself.

She puts down her book. "Here," she says, "roll over."

She reaches one leg across him then digs her fingers into his meaty shoulders, his neck. He is tight and groans.

"Will tomorrow be any better?" she asks.

He just hums.

"You know what you need?" she says, bending over. She takes his earlobe between her lips, then gently between her teeth.

"I think you need some candy," she says, dabbing her tongue into the valley of his collarbone.

She shifts onto her side and raises her left leg so he can roll onto his back. Then she straddles him again and he puts his hands around her waist, holding her in.

He smiles at her. "You know how I love candy," he says, and pulls her towards him, there in her bedroom.

f f f

There is a man in her bedroom. She doesn't know this at first; she only knows something was pushing against her. She opens her eyes and sees the clock. 3:43. Then she sees him, his legs near her shoulder. Standing above her. Staring down at her. The streetlights shine behind him through the window. She can't see his face; he is a tall dark shadow. But

she knows he can see her; she knows he knows she is awake.

She sees his hand reaching for her and she screams. The terror in her voice frightens her. And him. He steps back. She keeps screaming. She reaches her hand out to the night table; like radar, her hand finds the cylinder of pepper spray. She sits up; the sheet falls back to reveal her naked breasts; she presses the trigger. The spray hisses, a silver savior in the darkness. Direct into his eyes, his mouth—her hand is a frozen knot around the can. Now he is screaming too. He staggers back, grabs his face with his hands, a desperate and useless rubbing. She reaches under the bed and grabs the bat. She stands, naked, steady in the rage pumping through her. Her fists tighten; she raises her arms like she has practiced so many times; she swings. The bat knocks like wood on wood, right above his ear. He yells out and falls to his knees. She raises it again. She screams as she brings the bat down onto him—his head, his neck—over and over and over.

f f f

There is a man in her bedroom. He hangs on the wall; he looks down at her from above her bed, where she cannot see him when she is sleeping. He hangs on a cross, for her, they say, and blood drips from the nail holes in his hands and his feet, from the gouges made in his head by the ring of thorns he wears for her and all her sins. They took all his clothes except his underwear so he is almost naked, and they stuck a sword into his side like you would do to an animal, to be sure he was dead. If he didn't die no one could be saved. He died to save them because he loves them, because he loves her. She wonders, if other people love her, will they have to die too?

This same man also hangs across the room, above her desk. But this is a picture of him, a picture of his face before he died, before he was hung on the cross. She is glad this is the one she can see from her bed. He is smiling at her in a way that makes her smile back, like Mr. Rogers smiles at her from the TV. And he has wonderful blue eyes, bright blue like the bottom of the swimming pool. When someone tells

her that Jesus loves her, she thinks of this picture. They say Jesus will always take care of her and protect her if she is good, so she prays to him, but she prays to this picture and not the cross, unless her mother is watching. She'd like to meet the Jesus in this picture. They say she will some day and she hopes this is true. She'd like to give him a hug and a kiss on his soft cheek. She'd like to ask him why he let them put him up on a cross and kill him. What that had to do with her sins. How that saved her. Why everyone likes the cross so much more than the picture of his sweet face.

f f f

There is a man in her bedroom. At least there was when she left a few minutes ago. He was sitting on her small foam couch, wiping his nose. A friend had knocked; she had taken the opportunity to get out. In the bathroom, sitting on the toilet lid, she prayed he would be gone when she got back.

Tonight she met every hurtled accusation with a steady glare. No tears the way he wants. Straight-faced, she let his words spin around her head—her drinking, her friendship with Adam, her sorority, her parents, her better essay grade—all the proof of her constant mockery of him, her hidden agenda to humiliate him.

She is tired. Tired of always being wrong no matter what she does, tired of his games. Doesn't he realize that every one of his cry-baby displays pushes her further away, makes the man in her recoil in disgust? Men don't cry, her father's branded messages tell her, at least not more than their women do.

Maybe she just is cold-hearted, like he says.

Now, when she opens the door and sees the empty sofa, she says something out loud, something like "Thank God." She takes a deep breath. And then she hears him. Choking. The sound comes from the corner of the room and there she finds him, in the corner, on the floor, under her desk. With the dust balls and the shoe grit. Cowering and whimpering like a dog in a thunderstorm.

She walks over to the corner and peers at him under

the desk. His face is buried in his arms. He cringes, as if she has struck him, the look of her eyes brutal enough to draw blood. It terrifies her. He is insane, she thinks. What else could motivate a grown man to crawl under a desk?

But yesterday he held her close and tight until she felt safe, and she needs that. She needs him to love her; she needs him to be all she's ever wanted. So she will reach out and touch him now, lightly on his arm. She will let him pull away from her until he turns towards her again. She will help him out from under the desk and hold him. She will listen to him tell her she is to blame, the source of his suffering. She will listen to him tell her she is the only one who can help him. She will be his Satan and his Christ. She knows she is trapped between the two in a dark and dirty corner.

f f f

There is a man in her bedroom. When she opened the door she heard him call out to her.

"Hey ma'am. Handyman here fixing your ceiling."

"Great," she replied, dumping her coat and briefcase on the couch.

In the bedroom she sees him standing on a ladder scraping away pieces of the old, wet ceiling with a towel. His hands are big and leathery, his face tanned like her grandfather's would get at the beach. "Thanks for coming so quick," she says.

"Well ma'am, I wouldn't expect anyone to sleep in a room with a big hole in the ceiling like this," he says, laughing deep. "I don't know what Einstein decided buildings should have flat roofs. This thing gives us trouble every year."

He reaches down for a new tile. "Here, let me get it," she says, and steps forward. She holds the tile up to him. "Thanks, ma'am," he says, and his eyes twinkle above the rays of sunshine lining his face. She returns his smile, seeing her grandfather standing above her on the boardwalk, reaching down to take the starfish she's found for him.

f f f

There is a man in her bedroom. His voice, his presence still lingers. She was changing her clothes, getting ready for bed. She didn't think you could see into her bedroom with the shades drawn and only one light on. Especially the way her window sits so high up and at such an angle to the street.

At first, it didn't even occur to her that they were watching her. "Ooh sweetheart," he yelled out in the street. His voice lingered on every syllable, like he was licking his lips after a big meal. "You making my mouth water. Ooh, sweetheart. I want you. DO ME BABY." There were other men with him, laughing, whooping, whistling. It made her sick. Some poor woman can't even walk down the street without being invaded by these sperm brains, she thought. She said a silent prayer for the poor woman, hoping she could get away from them soon, and safely.

Only when she was smoothing lotion over her arms, her breasts, did she realize. "Oh baby, let me do that. I want to slip and slide all over you just like that," she heard.

She froze at first. Then she switched off the lamp and grabbed her nightgown.

"Oh honey, you ready for me now?" he called up. He sounded like he was right below her window. "I'm comin' up, then. I'll be right on up there and I'll love you like there's no tomorrow." The others laughed. "We'll all come," he said. "One big lovin' party." They laughed again; their voices moved away from her window.

She ran to her front door to make sure it was locked. Was the lock strong enough? There was nothing close by that she could push in front of the door, nothing heavy enough to keep him out. She stood behind the door, waiting, gasping for breath. Should she call the police? What if they came in before she could tell where she was, what was happening? Instead she prayed, braced herself against the door until her thigh muscles throbbed, and prayed for that poor woman.

f f f

There is a man in her bedroom. A man in her bed. He

took her face in his hands, pulled it close to his, and found her behind her eyes where she was hiding. He spoke. His soul flew into her eyes and through her and she knew. She came out, into this life, into this bed with him. She wakes slowly to the birds, the light of the sun's gentle birthing. She does not open her eyes. She wants to feel him there; she wants to learn to be able to know he is there without seeing him, without touching him.

No. This is wrong. She opens her eyes and turns, and there is only emptiness beside her. There are no birds yet this morning; there is no sun; there is no man in her bed. Only his ghost, costumed in her fears, anger, longing. These apparitions, her new creations, her greatest enemies, her long-time companions.

f f f

There is a man in her bedroom. Honestly, she can't remember the last time her father was in her bedroom; even when the phone was for her he'd just call her from down the hall. But tonight he knocked, "Hey Ann, got something to show you," he said, and she let him in without even thinking about it. *I must be growing up*, she thought.

He lays the open paper across her desk. "Didn't you go to school with this kid?" he asks.

Corporal Mike Reilly, reads the caption under the picture. Miker, they'd called him. Great drummer. Smart. He'd gotten her through senior year physics.

She nods, scanning the article.

"He killed himself," her father says. "Last week, when he was home on leave."

"My God," she whispers.

"They don't know why," her father says.

She hears his voice crackle, and she's so surprised she turns. His eyes are water. Not since her grandfather's funeral. Then she remembers.

"Ben," she says, remembering his army friend who killed himself six months before her parents' wedding.

Her father nods. "Yeah, he was nineteen, too. And a corporal."

For a minute she thinks to hug him. But her fingers reach out to the picture instead, trace the outline of Miker's cap, his standard issue stare, his clear and firm eyes. Her father stands beside her. She knows he is watching. She hopes he understands.

f f f

There is a man in her bedroom. The pounding in her breath tells her this before she is even awake. She tries to scream but her voice is locked like in a dream. She is stiff. She sits up. She darts her eyes around her, around her again.

There is no one there. There is no one in her bedroom. No white-horsed prince, no Savior. No man to rape her from herself, no man asking for something she does not want to give. She gets up, though, readies her finger on the trigger of her pepper spray, and walks from room to room. She checks the doors, all the windows, the locks, the bars she's put above each one. Nothing has been moved, but still her heart pounds. She sits on the couch in the silence, her own arms cocooning her in the darkness. She is trying to take them back, all the slices of herself she gave to her fear and longing, her pleas and her screams. But still her eyes dart the room, finger posed on the top of the small cylinder. Still she pants like an animal. Still she knows it will be a long time until she can sleep again, a long road back to her bedroom.

Sandra Kohler

Diaspora

Dreaming, my brother
and I at a ceremony we'd never
go to, reciting a tongue we've put on
with black garments, skull caps.
The rabbi and his wife perform
a charade, exhausted, wan.
We leave before the end;
driving, then a hotel where
the waitress insists we need a drink
and disappears.

These are what I remember:
the day he drove me to college,
leaving the home that vanished
when I left; trips from college,
heading north to ski. He'd steer
one-handed, conduct the convertible's
Beethoven thunder. Once
in New Hampshire on a winding road,
we couldn't go on: we stopped in the snow,
the dark; precisely, calm, he turned
the car, skidding at every inch
toward the drop.

I don't remember where
we got to, where we slept that night,
just turning, slipping toward the edge
in the white blizzard fall.
The country of my dream is flat,
the road not dangerous;
there is half-light, a remnant,
no more than we need. We are
smaller, spent. We find
the place for sleep.

Mary MacGowan

Where We Sleep

Second Avenue

First it was just a mattress on the floor.
We slept under a pale yellow quilt;
in its corner was another man's name
attached to mine by hand-stitched embroidery.
I picked at the threads 'til only the holes remained.

We leaned against bunched-up blankets
and played gin rummy to win,
kept a running score on the wall.
Long rows of sums
followed us into the fall.

We typed up summer's heart-felt poems,
stapled them together to make books
with names like *june '76*, and *my love, my life.*
The yellow quilt was lost or forgotten
by spring or summer '77.

St. Mark's Place

Here we built a high loft bed,
new mattress on unfinished wood.
Our lop-sided blankets formed a kind of tent
for the desk and typewriter below.

Remember the night you weren't home yet,
and I bolted the door as if you were, and went to bed?
Sound sleeper that I am, you had to knock
and yell my name, while a neighbor rang the phone.

My dream of church bells ringing faded into
my name echoing in the cavern of your voice.
That was the year I began to believe
you would always find me.

Town Garden Apartments

Your grandfather bought us a metal bed frame
with a foundation that tucked inside.
Taut as a trampoline,
the mattress made me stiff in the shoulders.

It was the year of our first child,
my job to wake up nights to feed him.
Once I held his crying face next to your sleeping one,
marveled at your ability to sleep through anything.

I gave up sharing a blanket with you
for all the nights you stole mine.
It made you sad,
thought it was a sign.

We became a family.
You went to work each day,
while I made beds, cooked meals,
and watched our boy grow.

Hamilton Street

The movers carried the same bed frame,
but we added a new, softer mattress.
A TV arrived on our bureau,
Letterman floated just above our toes.
It was here we brought our second child home.

Newborn nights, when I clawed at the blankets,
screaming *where's the baby?*
your arms pulled me back to bed,
it's okay, she's in her bassinet,
and always your arms around me,
go back to sleep, you said, and I did.

Green Hill Road

This is as far as we've come.
A carpenter built us this bed of glossy mahogany.
We measured walls, drew sketches,
conferenced calls, anticipated needs.

It stands in the middle of our room,
so heavy two men can barely lift one end.
We hope its weight will work as a kind of charm,
protecting us from the same fate as a newly-divorced
friend.

Our third child believes this dark brown vessel
has always been our bed, and why shouldn't she?
It makes her happy to watch TV up there,
reruns from the sixties, or an old movie.

Most days the blankets remain in a heap,
a still life of the night before.
But for her, I turn it into something more;
I fluff the pillows and straighten out the mess,
and sometimes she falls asleep
deep in its softness.

The Quilt

There was something firm about the rain
that morning, falling with the sound
of galloping horses hungry for space,
delirious and drugged, sisterless.

One strong patch of sun—
a leaking eye through the overcast
made its way to our wall
like a disconnected heart.

We might not have known where
we were if the quilt hadn't smelled
of cold apples and tea;
at somebody else's grandmother's

house and she fed us soups
that didn't make you full.
There because our grandmother
had died, remember sister,

we weren't allowed to see.
As if the color of blood were
translucent, we were to replace her
for a weekend with music boxes

in our backpacks and coloring books.
We didn't talk much, those few days,
though in our heads,
we must have wondered

if the horses were moving in circles,
and if grandmother knew where we were.

Dianna Henning

Absorption

I wish I could tell you about the man
bent over the drawings of his daughters
Sofia and Sonia, how like Saint Bartholomew
in Rembrandt's painting,
the man becomes so intent
that his pencil is now another finger,

and the man himself leaves,
as though absorption in what one loves
calls the being from the body,
and being, the only true state,
shapes the careful eyes and lips
of his girls. I would like to tell you
the man' s name, but I am sworn
to protect the identity of those incarcerated.

Were it possible to portray the man
accurately, his skin sewn in a tight weave
of tattoos, I'd start with his eyes,
tell you how I see in them the brown loaves
of bread his mother made,
his mouth about to form what he is unable to articulate.

What we cannot utter complete
and unarrested must write
its meaning elsewhere—the fragments
of language building the innovative.
If there is a heaven of words, or at the very least
a storage place, what goes unspoken
must send its roots into a future
we know nothing about.

It's nearly yard recall,
the man still draws his daughters
his head so close to the paper
that he could be outlining himself—
the shapes of their lovely mouths,
butterflies with spread wings.

Vivian Shipley

Shakespeare, You Should Revise or at Least Contemporize

Update *Romeo and Juliet* for the 21st century. A last name
on my son, my step-son, to be precise, would be a sweeter

smelling rose if it didn't trumpet out another man's name.
Matthew is hammocked between me and his biological

father who is antediluvian rock that won't shift no matter
how many band concerts I endure. I might have been

the verb in Matthew's conception, first heat inside
his mother's womb, laying claim to all that is beautiful.

I'm a captive of my own desire, however primitive, to
possess
my son in this modern world that shuffles our life like a card

shark. Matthew's mother who learned to decode him
before words, doesn't understand Romeo's question to

Juliet, *What's in a name?* any more than she does my need
To see my name on our son's team jersey. Her world has

healed. Some afternoons, she may think of shoulders
splintering a door, then her moans. If so, she won't let me

or our son know. Some words when spoken, like a birth
name, cannot be exchanged, cannot be erased from the heart.

Last Light

Pack up your gear, head for The Quinney Quencher
if you haven't speared a sturgeon ice fishing
on Lake Winnebago. Chug the house specialty,
a beer with a minnow in it. Required: a dark shack,

one big hole and the willingness to stare for hours.
You must let go of all the adjectives you've
been saving for *boring*. Describe looking
up your chimney waiting for a duck to fly over or

your father in Joshua Tree living seventeen years
watching for a nolina in his side yard to
bloom. Desert people know how to wait
for magic, for a flower that is not minor, that is not

common. Some years, hillsides of nolinas send up
spikes as big as a leg. When the bud unfolds,
it's the size of a family Christmas tree like
those discarded evergreens marking roads plowed

by Otter Street Fishing Club into grids crisscrossing
Lake Winnebago. Twenty inches of frozen
water and 3779 shanties will give you faith
needed to walk on ice. Sturgeon avoid light; paint

inside walls of your shanty black. No windows, sun
on the ice outside will give you illumination,
a yellow-green glow from an opening about
the size of a kitchen table. Waiting, hum the theme

from Beethoven' s last piano sonata, the one where
you imagine him looking through the bright
entry of the world into the dark. It's illegal
to drop bait for a sturgeon. Sit over the hole, jiggle

decoys and wait for the fish's natural curiosity to
surface. For lures, you can carve a wooden
walleye, weight it with lead or your brother's
plastic pipe dripping with mirrors and plastic figures

of Sesame Street's Miss Piggy and Cookie Monster.
Willing to experiment? Dangle an agitator
out of a Maytag washing machine, Styrofoam
coffee cup or even a bowling ball painted green with

pink spots like Brett Olson who has speared fifteen
sturgeon, his quota of one a year, since he
turned fourteen. Brett swears his catch all
came in so fast, they headed the bowling ball and

rolled over. If you do sight a sturgeon, drop the spear
hanging from the ceiling, don't throw it.
Spear fishing is about trusting your eight foot
twenty pound shaft. Attached to fifty feet of nylon

rope, its tips should hang under the surface, disengage
so your dinner can't pull away. Don't become
discouraged. Like the bloom of the nolina,
the sturgeon is worth the wait. Syd Groeschl has tried

for fifty years; Tom Springborn has had no luck for
nineteen. Both know their prize must be right
beneath them and their arms stretch, hoping
to pull out the five feet and one hundred pounds. It

is the chance to prepare one themselves, taste smoke
from their own wood that keeps them crossing
Wisconsin ice each winter. That and having
their picture taken weighing in for the cover story

in USA TODAY. Camera shy, for you the appeal is that
the sturgeon is so old and has been swimming
through dinosaurs, wilderness, other predators in
silence, tireless as a glacier for 150 to 200 million years.

Resting under your feet, it offers a way to absorb part
of your past and frees you from having to visit
mounted skeletons in the Smithsonian. Hooded
in bone, lessons about survival are trapped in a world

of coded cells in this fish that has swallowed the flesh
of centuries. Learning patience from your father,
you have seen the nolina bloom. It is enough for
you, that in the darkness below, your dream is waiting.

Reamy Jansen

Available Light

Blinded By the Light

Being blind sometimes means having not too much darkness but, rather, too much light. One can be dazzled, with light unmaking the world, leaving it overexposed, browning and beyond recall. Leaving one staring at the sun. Such was my first encounter with not being able to see, of being blinded by light.

My eye doctor, having discovered my middle-aged glaucoma and checked its slow, destructive pressures, decided to send me forth to a retina specialist, retinas tending to detach in my family, offering only half worlds until put back in their place. (Such an event once occured to my father while playing tennis, and he was left, literally, with a half-court game.) The examination itself brought no surprises—these curved walls would not come tumbling down. Not yet, the doctor said, perhaps not ever. But in order to have his look about, my pupils had been dilated out to what felt like the diameter of a penny, and, on leaving, I had to shield my eyes even to negotiate the office's soft grey carpeting.

Outside, on a hot July New York noon, the light hits me with the force of several suns, with brilliance everywhere and unavoidable. I shrink from it, head retracting protectively, and my hand futilely shading my eyes. The sidewalk becomes a horizonless desert, and my ten-block trek north to the crosstown bus has me looking to others as if I'm battling a gale known only to myself. The trip back is one of tactile uncertainty and continual flinching. After an hour, I arrive home. Safe. Several hours later, my eyes returned to normal. Nevertheless, I had been burned.

The Blue Light

At age sixteen I failed the Motor Vehicle eye test for my first driver's permit by misreading the solid block letters of the chart's third line from the top. I should not have been surprised by this miserable performance, for I had known, though not believed, that my vision even then had deteriorated markedly, a situation, though, that I'd mentioned to no one. I could no longer read the blackboards in my tenth-grade classes and was stumbling badly in all my subjects. Fearfully alert to any slight signs of my mortality, I had, nevertheless, developed a compensatory ability to fend off troubling realities.

So finely tuned was this capacity that I thought the chalk used in the classroom was of a particularly inferior quality. Geometry was now no longer a matter of sharply-drawn triangles and trapezoids, their angles filled with degree markings, but of figures that were, rather, a maze of thick, foggy, and indeterminate lines. I never seemed to catch on to the fact that the blackboard came into focus each time I passed it on the way out of class. Interned in adolescent hell that year, perhaps I had already given up hope. So eye doctors became a bit like secular saviors, and I still remember the thrill at being able again, with glasses, to read a simple street sign. I was once more oriented in a world with focus and perspective. Nevertheless, many of my inchoate fears about how ungrounded I felt began to focus on the vulnerabilities of my eyes.

A few years later, needing an eyeglass prescription change just after I had crossed over the transom from teen to nominal adult, I paid a visit to my father's ophthalmologist. This was the first visit I had ever made alone to a doctor, and it brought me in contact with a heliophobe who kept his office as dark as a movie theater.

Once my eyes adjusted, though, his office revealed just the right amount of reassuring male squalor of cracked, button-burst leather furniture, and poorly stacked, perpetually cascading journals and files. It looked, in fact, pretty much

like my dad's office. And the examination itself proceeded as a predictable mix of magic lantern show, with boldface letters rather than shadow puppets, accompanied by a cadenced elliptical patter ("this, or *this?")* involved in the twirling and selecting of lenses, a process sustained until the crispest image was determined.

The unnerving part of the examination came last, with my first test for glaucoma. This procedure involved a simple machine that, to the testee, comprised a metal chin rest and head band and slightly resembled the iron restraints once used to harness the insane. At its other end were the controls, with a knob that moved toward me a metering device that would rest against my eye and record its pressure. To accomplish this docking of mechanism and eyeball, I would open wide my slightly anesthetized eye while fixing its gaze on a blue "target light"—an illumined, protruding circle that burned as brightly as a newly-struck kitchen match. Having no knowledge then of this device and its operation, I came close to fainting, fearing that the instrument enclosed a needle readied to pierce my cornea to accomplish its purpose. After all, the three concentric circles inscribed within the blue sphere resembled an archer's target. Some minutes later, after a series of slow breaths and being restored to close to normal consciousness, the test was complete. Glaucoma proved then not to be a worry.

By the time I was forty, I had become an experienced and casual hand with the blue light.

Legacies

In looks, I am my mother's son—a Culbertson through and through. Tallish and big boned, we tend to loom over others and fill up a room. We all have noses as distinctive as Bob Hope's or Richard Nixon's, and thin, tight, disapproving mouths that reveal our Scottish Presbyterian roots, ones that arc downward into a readiness to project a fated, gloomy view of the world. Also, the lot of them seem to possess 20/20 vision. Eyeglasses are unknown.

My father's chromosomal contributions are less visible. Foremost, there is the legendary "Jansen *memory,"* which I see manifested in my information-absorbing sons. The other legacy, glaucoma, I hope will pass them by. When its presence is revealed to me, my father apologizes, for he feels personally responsible for this bad roll of the loaded genetic dice. (Montaigne in his forties is also surprised at the painful inheritance of his father's kidney stones, whose presence was previously "concealed," and he wonders bemusedly how it was that only he, among all his siblings, should find himself the recipient of "this slight bit of substance, with which he made me, (and which should) bear so great an impression.")

Glaucoma becomes a new, late-onset bond between father and son. We now compare eye tests, and, invariably, I am the one to take him for eye checks, and, once, for laser surgery—looking on as light lances the lenses of his eyes, leaving their surfaces forever delicately slit, if one wants to look closely. The operation is the last attempt to retard the on-going destruction of his optic nerve. Its effects, though, are merely *son et lumiére.*

My first awareness of this potential and degenerative estate comes in 1955, when my mother descends to our house's cavernous basement, where since early childhood I have staked my claim to what are various dim and barren play areas. That year I was a habitué of what I liked to think even in those pre-Sputnik days was my subterranean science laboratory. But as much as it furnished me with enlightenment about crystals, cells, and explosive chemicals, this domain functioned more as a place where I could withdraw, although it may also have resembled the place of a child hiding noticeably, hoping for discovery. My mother's appearance in my underworld is an occasion, for I have felt invisible in this house more often than not, a small moon, unregistered and detached from the parental orbit. "Your father is going blind," are her only words before trembling and tears, and I know that my job, at age twelve, is to con-

sole, which I do ineptly. She wants me to hold her, I think. But we have never touched, not that I can remember, anyway.

What frightens her are imagined scenes of my father blinded, no longer striding with determination and commercial vigor to the Long Island Railroad, but, instead, becoming helpless. I know, too, that she has images of financial ruin, for stock tickers don't print in braille. In the back of my mind, I think what she fears most is that he will be home forever, a blind, angry, and idle king in his armchair. This prospect is a bit of a fearful image for *me,* too, for would I be even more the phantom to him than I am already?

Of course, none of this dark drama came to pass. There was, first, my mother's tendency to stampede a few facts in the most disastrous direction possible. Second, in reality, his condition could be treated simply with eyedrops. But from that day forward I became a secret observer and sharer of my father's eye problems—retinas that would need reattaching, cataracts that had to be shaved away, drops that steadily increased in dosage, and, eventually, separate medicines that had to be applied to each eye. After one operation much later, the doctors seemed to have torn away part of his left iris to enlarge the light-resisting aperture. His eye had become a ragged hole, petals ripped off in a clumsy grasp, and for some time I could not look at him directly and was ashamed.

Such steady efforts maintained his vision into his late seventies, when, suddenly, other medical difficulties set his seeing on a rapid, downward course. A black hole came to exist about thirty feet into his horizon—cars that he saw approaching this periphery would vanish as if part of the news footage of an earthquake. He more and more relied on a variety of lighted magnifying glasses, but eventually even the strongest lenses would fail him, and his eyes' interiors became his sole world. His cosmos was his own, with storm fronts within those orbs that clouded independent of

the weather. When he would ask me now and again if it was hazy out, I'd lie and say yes. The only way for his doctor to test his field of vision was to fasten fat clumps of white tissue paper to the wall of his office with map pins. Most of this improvised geography escaped him, and he was, finally, legally blind. Although he hadn't driven his aging Plymouth for three years, the State of New York confirmed his new standing by asking for the return of his driver's license. Such official news created the only crack I have ever seen in his usually cheerful and resilient demeanor.

All's Right With the World

By the time I was in my mid-thirties, I had become anxiously single and was engaging in random glaucoma checks. At night and alone, driving or walking, I'd squint at the street light, looking for the telltale haloes that would reveal that something was amiss. I subjected myself to this activity when I was feeling particularly lonely and mortal. What I would see provided just the terrifying ambiguity that I desired. And my nascent fear of blindness was not one whit diminished by the fact that year after year my eye pressure checks turned out fine.

As I entered my early forties, I had metamorphosed into a relatively responsible, and somewhat less fearful married man. I had become a father, no less, of a three-and-a-half-year-old boy, whom I loved in a way I never thought possible. An invisible artery—what the Japanese call "a red thread"—was always there between us, and I watched over him all the time. But while I could physically transport this child upon my shoulders for hours, I was also beginning to feel the gravitational tug of middle age.

More inhibiting to my bookish ways, though, was that I could no longer easily read with my eyeglasses on and, instead, had to pull the page to within a few inches of my eyes. Reading glasses awaited me, said my friends who'd passed that way before. I should avoid bifocals, I was told,

for they made one look the dodderer before fifty. Bifocals, though, were what I found I would need; I was just getting too nearsighted. That bit of news was the first, and manageable, consequence of visiting my eye doctor. But the eye-pressure test that was usually so *pro forma*—my annual staring into the familiar blue light—now claimed center stage. My pressure is indeed up, and I am to be sent, in a few days, to the New York Eye and Ear Hospital for specialized tests—"tonography" and "field of vision." Both sound benignly geographic, but I am not lulled into believing I'm going to brush up on earth science. This traversing of my globes, I know, will be dire.

Tense with fear during this three-day interim, I drift in a noumenal haze. (I am particularly aware that my father's sight is failing faster, for the thin, oddly-angled wires of his optic nerves have begun to fray and are finally snapping like fatigued bridge cables.) I clear myself of self-absorption one night later, though, while I am putting Paul to bed. I notice that his stuffed animals are neatly covered to their chins by blankets and lined up at right angles to his mattress. Each doll has stickers over both eyes. "Their brains are sick," he tells me, and here I see how much I have been silently signaling my terror. The polar bears, pandas, and Curious George recover, albeit slowly at the rate of one animal a day, after I assured this sensitive, attuned boy that I'd be taking some eye tests that I needed for new glasses. He seemed calmed, and I am somewhat. Certainly I had not been blind to him.

Still, like my mother—long dead, but whose ideas of storytelling included Gothic tales of the horrors of gum surgery—I couldn't help but think about how grim these tests were likely to be. I imagined that tonography involved no less than the removal of my eyeball, with which medical technicians would play some sort of evaluative handball.

The following morning I headed off for the hospital, alone. The tests, when I actually submitted to them, proved less horrific than anticipated, as is occasionally the case with

reality. Tonography involved a subtler reading of pressures than that offered by the regular office procedure, and the field of vision test was rather like a video game carried on inside a small planetarium. Despite its arcade feel, though, this second test, I knew, was serious stuff—as it gauged how far one was away from that stage where the cars would eventually begin to disappear if all wasn't going well.

Like many other eye tests, field of vision began with the ever-present chin rest, positioning the face just inside half of a sphere reminiscent of an oversized collander with holes the size of pinpoints. When the lights in the room went out, the lights within the half shell started to blink on and off, seemingly at random. For each light I saw, I was to depress the button on a hand-held buzzer of the kind used by players on Jeopardy. It's difficult not to slip into a trance with this thing or even lose consciousness entirely. The half globe had a way of swallowing the world along with normal notions of space and time. Eventually I suspected that I was imagining lights when there were none, and I was equally unsure that the lights I thought I was seeing were nothing but an *ignis fatuus* of what I'd just seen. Were these imaginary stars in a real firmament? I'd never felt so engulfed, and just before I felt about to go under, the test was over. I scored well, the technician informed me. No black holes yet. No disappearing vehicles at the moment.

The Small Rain

But I do, according to the tonography results, have glaucoma. And while the pressures were only slightly over the borderline, I am conscious that this affliction has visited me ten years before it came upon my father. The journey back to my apartment was another long one, filled as I am with awareness of the pumping pressure in my eyes, most likely, though, a mixture of eyestrain and self-pity. Prescription folded in my pocket, this was to be the first day that I would be taking eyedrops twice daily for the rest of my life. The little 4ml plastic dispensing bottle with its light blue cap

had, in fact, been familiar to me since my teens; my father had always kept his in the egg tray in the refrigerator. My Sears Coldspot now held my very own bottle, cupped within an egg compartment. Each morning and evening, I would have to extract the bottle, twist off its top, and pull my lower lid down, while with two fingers my other hand would squeeze the bottle poised above my brow to release one tiny bomb of a drop into the lower part of the eye. For a while, this activity ruled my day. It was as if I were injecting myself with insulin rather than splashing down a few curative drops. And also for a while I wanted no one to see me in what I took to be a humiliating rite, one I performed furtively. In the first few days of my new offices I was continually reminded of my father putting in his drops and how exposed were his eyes as he did this, their surfaces glistening and trembling like fresh egg whites. He didn't seem to mind, but the watcher in me couldn't stand the nakedness of it all. I didn't want my boy to see me in this light.

When I Consider How My Light is Spent

A short while ago, I sat for a computerized field of vision test and then watched while the laser printer marked the perimeters of a general visual field. The printout looked a bit like a stylized skull, its dull ghost-eyed blankness exaggerated by the absence of nose and mouth. The lines that inscribed it were composed of finely printed numbers ranging from the twenties (good) down to their negative opposites (bad). The test offered up what might be bad news—I'm doing below-average work, something like a D, around my nasal periphery, that area where sight first flickers out. According to my doctor, who sounds reassuring, but hasn't quite got me convinced, it's probably no problem, and eye drops in greater dosages—ones at my father's current level, but he was in his eighties—would remediate the difficulty. And I guess I'm reassured enough.

I'm also conscious that at some, probably far-off, point the world I see will begin to abrade, fray, and, ultimately,

may be scraped away the way a coin's edge strips the silver-gray coating off a lottery ticket. My consolation may be the knowledge—mine and my father's—that the phenomenal world might not be so substantial anyway. I've come close to seeing eye to eye with Ireland's first philosopher, Bishop Berkeley. I've decided that we not only see, but also construct, our worlds as best we can, inventing our lives in relation to whatever is out there. I know now that there are ways of not seeing that I will always have to be careful of and that there are darker blindnesses— "not only of woods and shady trees," as Frost's reflective farmer, standing on the brink of the Great War, observes—that keep us from seeing trees falling in forests and from reading the faces of those who are beloved.

Scott Withiam

Mermaids

It doesn't matter at first
that out the restaurant window
overlooking our safe harbor,
out in the middle of the mute winter water—
yellows and blues—there's a tied down skiff
for ambience, its bow against the tide,
and the trailing wake all the time making it
look like it's going somewhere, and not.

Or, that across the table from me sits
the last business owner in town,
the woman who normally cuts my hair
using a bowl. The woman who monthly
holds and fiddles with my head
till everything I know spills out is just beginning
to tell me how it wouldn't be that unusual,
seals have been sighted here before—in this close.

Well, what if I told you she and I are being watched
under an ancient dreamy pretense
that people in small villages watch out
for each other because everyone still has a part, is integral
to the survival, the success of the community,
when really it's because I'm married
and dining with a single woman,
that in this restaurant people are food?

We're all that's left.
Which gives her and me our "special" appeal, I guess,
which is why I asked her out for a quick bite
at the restaurant in the first place—that,
and the bowl—and she consented.
Convinced of creating better business,
she stands and removes the bowl from my head,
turns it over to show it's empty, nothing in it,

like all our meetings, as in the skiff
going nowhere. Now she settles back
into what she was saying, the seals,
their affectionate ways, their torpedo shapes.
Once she was young and dreaming on the bank
opposite the skiff. One startled her,
surfacing, clearing its nostrils. *Wow,* she says,
what makes men turn them into anything
more beautiful than what they are?

Edmund Pennant

The Clownfish
(Baltimore Aquarium)

Eyes of the timid clownfish know and distrust
that skylight of erratic radiance, clockwork
heavens for true believers, or else survivors
who see in those brilliant, bubbly undulations,
duplicity of devils and angels, predators and prey.

Beware (her clownfish mother warned)
those canny gossips of the reef, sinuously,
politically correct, who think they know
what's up and have no empathy for fish
born garish, vulnerable, hooked on humility.

Especially when her body's heavy with roe
it's in her bones to be wary of divers
who rise from radiolarian deeps to belch
a message of doom meant to intimidate
lesser nibblers in the food chain, or

who beguile a school of clowns with graceful
immelmann maneuvers, while setting their jaws
to full extension mode, coming in behind
the camouflaging lie that hunger is
its own excuse for killing. It's no good

to be told by savants of the reef, so long
as there's a reef there will be clowns,
that clowns engender the coral of survival;
that in the absence of a symbiosis of stars,
starlight and sad laughter have no place.

And this she knows: the baleful scowl of the great
white shark, the size and set of his dentures,
weigh little in the scales of Darwinian time,
considering his deepsea neuroses, wanting eons
to correct the self-hatred that drives him.

Which is why the clownfish's mask, warped to
a compassionate wince, isn't the cartoony grin
a killer whale fixes on his face for kids. She despises
the antics of too-obedient dolphins, their *pas de deux*
on tireless tails, their breakthrough leapings

through the integument above, and divings; despises
their cunning, ingratiating grin for a piece of cod.
Whereas the clownfish is the reef's logo proper
of existential pain; outrage, too, as when poor fools
parade the coral boulevards in drag.

As for the irascible moray eels who sit
outside their *pieds-à-terre* all day ready
to snap up clownfishes tail-first to prove
their gustatory zest intact, it's bruited
about as fact: morays have been caught

in flagrante delicto with certain squids
of the genera *Loligo*, penile sybarites
that squirt black Rorschachs for privacy,
flaunting power of the pen as almost but not
quite equal to raw libido's, odd gratitude

the clownfish thinks, for sexual favors,
like the victim's who kisses its torturer's hand.
So long as the reef has room both for her tribe
of clowns and variegated denizens of zen,
such as jellyfish that pulsate in their nightgowns,

harlequin's heart will know the redeeming woe
of wit in the teeth of danger and absurdity,
especially when schools of that rude creature
on the other side of the glass, crinkled fins
astride their heads, medusa hairs atop, stare
goggle-eyed as the clownfish pass in parade.

Jacob M. Appel

The Consummate Marauder

Word travelled fast at Westwood College—an institution perennially bereft of novelty—and by noon, congratulatory phone calls inundated Dr. Blanning's office. After twenty-seven invitations issued over the course of three decades, the Czech playwright Vlada Molodnik had finally accepted an offer to deliver a series of lectures. His subject: Piracy in Modern Literature. Such an unexpected windfall should have pleased the provost. Instead, it left him with a nervous, sinking sensation as if his stomach were being extracted through his bladder.

All afternoon, Blanning paced his cluttered office repeating the five line letter of acceptance until the words rolled off his swollen tongue like verse. They were precise, stiff, jagged. Almost parody. "Since *your* backwater institution has determined to disrupt the serenity of *my* retirement on an annual basis, I hereby accept *your* request. The subject of the oration shall be Piracy in Modern Literature. My decision bears no relation to Dr. Blanning's self-indulgent analysis of my work, for his volume remains unworthy of public notice. However, I am struck with an unhealthy impulse to remind him of my consummate palpability. No photography. V. Molodnik."

The provost dragged his club foot across the carpet and pondered this singular response. The letter itself possessed a consummate palpability, he noted. Its meaning remained elusive. Blanning did not release the text to the public. He did share it with the Chairman of the English Department.

"The man has been living in a Carpathian hut for thirty years," Carter Nesbitt observed through a broad grin. "I wouldn't take it to heart, George. As far as I'm concerned, you're as consummately palpable as the next guy." Nesbitt fumbled with his pipe and let forth a jocular chuckle. He had joined the academy to avoid the war and stayed on.

The sinecure offered him prestige and ample time to expend his inheritance.

"But that's exactly my point," the provost countered. "I'm seventy years old, Carter. I'm the leading scholar in the nation, in the world really, on the subject of European theater. . . . And now one of the fathers of modern drama suggests that I'm unworthy of public notice. What do you think that means?"

Nesbitt walked to the window and shut it methodically. He made another effort to light his pipe, then seated himself on the edge of Blanning's desk as if it were his own bed and allowed his left loafer to fall to the floor with a resounding thud. "I think it means that he's batty," the English professor declared. "Years of isolation and all that. What do you want me to tell you, George? That he's been sent by God to offer you one last chance at redemption? I can see it now—Molodnik, a modern day Jonah, converting the heathen Ninevah of Westwood!"

"I'm serious," the provost retorted. He watched anxiously as his colleague attempted to propel his right loafer into the air and catch it. The shoe bounced off Nesbitt's outstretched fingers. "Now that Hattie is gone, I've been thinking about retiring—I should have done it before, you know—but this throws a wrench into everything. It's almost a challenge."

"Some challenge. He's a batty playwright from a landlocked country delivering a lecture on pirates. . . . A subject grand in its absurdity."

"I'm sure there's more to it," said Blanning. He adjusted his necktie in the hanging mirror and ran a flabby hand through his thinning hair. "He's saying that his art is real, tangible, and that my scholarship is ethereal. Of no lasting consequence."

"He's an angry loner who doesn't like to be bothered by invitations," Nesbitt replied.

"Then why accept?" the provost demanded.

"I guess you'll have to ask him."

The English professor placed both shoes on his hands

like mittens; he launched into a round of resonant applause—the seal impersonation that drove his classes to hysterics. Yet holding his pipe with his teeth, the stem jutting out sideways under the incandescent light, his performance sent a shiver down the provost's perspiring neck. For a split second, the band of the pipe glistened like a saber and its owner grew to resemble a buccaneer: A vivid, indelible image that the provost would forever associate with Molodnik's visit.

f f f

If the truth be told, the provost's doubts predated the playwright's letter. In the months after the death of his wife, Dr. Blanning had experienced a late-life crisis. It began as an inkling and expanded into a full-fledged notion before ricocheting haphazardly through his mind like grapeshot: The provost arrived at the daunting realization that he was only a provost.

One cannot teach *Ulysses* and *Mrs. Dalloway* year upon year without recognizing the vast, almost ecumenical mediocrity of man's condition. Yet in the murky years preceding his wife's death, Blanning had focused his thoughts on the insignificance of humanity as an abstract principle. His own lot remained unprobed. If one had seen him wandering the campus with his eye patch and his club foot, a stack of tattered volumes balanced precariously under his elbow, one might have thought, "That man has known suffering." Yet the provost's studies had brought him knowledge at the expense of wisdom. He concluded as much in the empty days after Hattie's funeral, the sudden recognition that he was only a provost hanging about his neck like a chain of millstones. Weaker men often buckle under such pressure. They stalk movie stars. They assassinate presidents. Or they acquire an inexplicable zeal for bird-watching, canasta, J&B whiskey. George Blanning just brooded and pondered, analyzing his life like a literary text, alternately justifying and bemoaning the plight of a provost.

Wisdom did come to him eventually, the afternoon of his conversation with Nesbitt. Gale-force wisdom. He re-

read Molodnik's letter one last time and experienced a surge of nervous energy that sent him limping rapidly into the corridor shouting "No photography" with youthful vigor.

"Are you all right?" inquired Mrs. Conch, looking up from her magazine. The receptionist fingered a pencil and gnawed nervously at the eraser.

"Am I all right?!" Blanning cried. "Am I all right?" This response convinced Mrs. Conch that the provost was far from all right (too many hours in the company of the daft Nesbitt, she thought) and she was reaching for the phone to call security when her boss slammed Molodnik's letter down in front of her. "Do you see that, Greta? He says, 'No photography.'"

"Who says no photography?" The receptionist bit off the end of the eraser and spit the remnants into a crumpled tissue.

"Molodnik, Greta," the provost explained as he regained his composure. He wiped his brow with his handkerchief and paused in an effort to reassert his dignity. "I'm sorry, Greta, but I just had a revelation. A revelation. All these months since Hattie died, I've had this feeling that I've wasted my life...as if I could have been a great sea captain and was set adrift by mutineers." The lines deepened on Mrs. Conch's brow; Blanning noted the concern on her pock-marked face. "Let's put it this way, Greta," he stated crisply. "I once wanted to be a playwright and I now recognize that I'm never going to be one. I'll always be one of the critics, never the subject of criticism."

"I see," observed Mrs. Conch. She didn't.

"But that's all about to change, Greta," Blanning concluded. "I'm going to be the man who photographed Vlada Molodnik."

"Is that a fact?" asked Mrs. Conch. She was not one for revelations.

Blanning wiped his good eye with his thumb and waited for her to congratulate him. When she returned to her magazine, he assessed her warily from his office door. Her portly frame, full and flowing under a royal blue dress, reminded

the provost of a great whale. She was an expansive, ignorant creature. Her torpid mass provoked him.

"I'll have you know, Greta, that Molodnik has never been photographed. He's a hermit, the Greta Garbo of drama." Blanning launched this last salvo with the force of a harpoon. The receptionist looked up at the mention of her namesake, but the provost had already retreated into his office.

f f f

In the months leading up to the playwright's visit, the provost's plan assumed a legendary quality at Westwood. The faculty debated the merits of his scheme over cod sandwiches and grilled chicken breasts at the University Club. A graduate student in visual arts claimed to have sold Blanning a second-hand tripod. In the dormitories, on the playing fields, at the mahogany seminar table in the Department of Philosophy—behind every hatch and within every hold, the saga played itself out in increments of gossip as the provost frantically taught himself the art of photography. If one saw him with his eye patch, dragging his club foot across the campus with a camera under his elbow, one would have said, "That man will photograph Molodnik." It was not that anybody other than the provost actually possessed a vested interest in the outcome of the endeavor—the Czech playwright's reputation lagging well behind that of Greta Garbo—but only that the provost's emerging obsession filled the silence of the rural campus like a foghorn on the high seas.

"Don't you think you're getting a bit carried away?" Carter Nesbitt asked one afternoon. He had accosted the provost at the edge of the small brook that meandered its way along the far boundary of the campus. Blanning tinkered intently with the dials on his camera, the lens focused at the base of a nearby willow.

"Nonsense, Carter," the provost replied without looking up. "Let him criticize my scholarship. I'm the one they'll remember. The only reason anyone remembers Livingstone, I remind you, is because Stanley found him."

Nesbitt removed his turtleneck sweater and tied it around his waist. He splashed icy stream water on his face. "Look, George. I'm as deranged as they come around here. You're talking to a man who ate a pound of raw meat in a seminar last year to demonstrate an obscure point in *The Merchant of Venice*, so this isn't someone like Anderson in Religious Studies saying that non-consensual photography is unethical—"

"Is he saying that?"

"Morally deviant is the term he used," Nesbitt observed with frustration, "but that's not the point. Photograph him. Don't photograph him. It doesn't matter. But don't let it swallow you, George." The English professor flashed a grin from under his water-soaked moustache. "Do you remember my joke about Jonah and the redemption of Westwood, George? Well Molodnik's swallowing you and dragging you underwater."

The provost looked up inquisitively. He peered at his colleague through his good eye, his photographer's eye—the fresh, meticulous appraisal of a religious convert surveying a former confederate. Water trickled down Nesbitt's neck and dampened his undershirt. The unlit pipe jutted out between his thin lips.

"Do you ever think, Carter, that scholarship is a form of piracy?" Blanning asked with a hint of malice. "That we board other people's artistic vessels and plunder their genius?"

"He hasn't left Czechoslovakia since 1952, George," Nesbitt responded. "You're taking this too far. And besides, what makes you think you'll be able to photograph him? He'll take preventive measures."

"Because I'm the ultimate pirate," the provost declared. "The Aborigines of Australia believe that if you photograph a man, you capture his soul. I'm going to capture Molodnik's soul and I'm going to hold it hostage."

The provost strapped his camera over his shoulder and lumbered down the path, his club foot trailing like a valise on a tether. "They don't really believe that," Nesbitt called out, but the provost ignored him. He was late for a meeting

with the *New York Times* photographers—the men who had come to photograph the man who would photograph Molodnik.

f f f

The playwright arrived at Westwood with a black bandana over his face and a parrot perched upon his shoulder. He was a mammoth figure. Thick mast-like arms sloped into calloused hands. The matted grey hairs on his bare chest indicated his place in the provost's generation. Yet his coarse skin displayed the consistency of a cantaloupe rind and he exuded an aura of timelessness that contributed to the authenticity of his pirate's garb.

"You are Blanning," Molodnik stated and extended his hand to the provost. He enunciated each word with precision as if dismantling a mechanical watch.

"Molodnik, I presume" the provost responded. He had choreographed this meeting in his mind for nearly three months.

"Presumption is social embezzlement," the playwright observed coldly. His words resonated across the reception hall. The playwright had arrived fifteen minutes before the first scheduled lecture. Blanning had instructed Nesbitt, the provisional chauffeur, to stow Molodnik's luggage at the Westwood Country Inn; Molodnik had countermanded the order. The guest picked up one valise with either arm and followed the provost down the corridor to the auditorium. "There will be no photographers," the playwright stated. "Do we have an understanding?"

"Indeed we do," replied Blanning with suppressed enthusiasm. His efforts to keep pace with the guest speaker had nearly winded him. "But might I ask you, Dr. Molodnik, why you finally chose to accept our invitation?"

"Genius!" interjected the parrot in a heavy Czech accent. "Imbecile!"

The playwright dropped the two suitcases one at a time. He folded his arms across his chest. His head rose a full foot above the provost's and the luster of his gold rings and hoop earrings sent Blanning's stomach churning. A minia-

ture fox hunt transpired in his bowels. Only anticipation of the evening to come kept the smaller man from losing his composure. Molodnik may be the grandiose artist, Blanning thought, but I am the consummate marauder.

"The bird speaks the truth, *Dr.* Blanning," said Molodnik. "Genius. Imbecile. An arduous cliff to scale; and easy precipice from which to fall. Your study of my work displeases me, *Dr.* Blanning. Your manipulations of the language, your turn of a phrase—you seem to suppose that it is you, the critic, who are the artist. And criticism is not an art, *Dr.* Blanning. It is a vocation."

"Aww! Genius!" screeched the parrot. The playwright patted the bird gently with a colossal palm.

Watching the audience file into the hall through a crack in the curtains, the provost pondered the playwright's explanation. His hatred was rejuvenated. In Molodnik's imposing ostentation, Blanning recognized all that he had never been. The masked giant stood several paces behind him and cast an ominous, faceless silhouette that dwarfed the provost. Blanning focused all of his energy on the evening to come—on the flash of the camera that would forever blot out the shadow. He stepped out into the light, rapidly extricating his bad leg from the curtain, and strode to the lectern. As he did so, he heard the parrot squawk, "Aww! Imbecile!" and then Molodnik emitted a granular laugh that reverberated like the crushing of ice.

f f f

The man who was to photograph Molodnik endured the lecture in seething silence. He sat in the front row with his bad leg propped up on a folding chair, more a part of the spectacle than the audience. At first, the playwright's mask confounded the crowd. They had not come to hear Molodnik. They had come to watch Blanning capture the playwright's soul. Yet slowly but surely, the visitor lured them in with his imperial presentation. And they laughed at the interjections of the parrot.

"Artist and critic," Molodnik declaimed. "Pirate and parrot. In each case, the former is a man of action. Explorer.

Navigator. Transgressor. All art, I suggest, is a piracy of nature. The dramatist plunders the high seas of humanity in search of his treasure...."

Molodnik paced as he spoke. His footfalls punctuated his sentences, the click of his boot heels on the hardwood stage creating a macabre staccato. Blanning contrasted these firm strides with his own gait—the heavy, forced steps of a man struggling through water. He could not see the speaker's face, but he imagined that Molodnik was speaking to him directly. The throng's presence was pretence. This was a gangplank struggle between provost and playwright. Let him have his moment of glory, Blanning told himself. It will fatten him for the sharks.

"The parrot," the speaker continued, "is forever at the mercy of the pirate. The bird may speak while the corsair remains silent, but he speaks with a limited vocabulary. He can add to the pirate's authority. But without his human perch, he squawks incoherently. I suggest that the same is true of the critic in a vacuum."

"Imbecile!" agreed the parrot. "Aww! Imbecile! Aww! Imbecile."

Blanning glared at the bird with his one eye. The parrot met his gaze. Its rich blue feathers glowed synthetic as it hopped several times along its human perch—much in the way a child can move a pen from one end of its mouth to the other using only its teeth. The two black, lidless eyes remained fixed on the provost. They stared at him confidently, matching him blink for blink, and for a split second banished all thought of the photograph from the provost's turbid brain. The bird's impudence incensed Blanning. This is a challenge, the provost thought. If he could just break the parrot's will, he knew, his own life would fall into place. Yet the bird remained steadfast, obstinate. The speaker's words funnelled past the provost innocuously: The whole world contracted into a battle between cyclops and parrot. Thunderous applause caught him off guard.

"Well I guess you won't be able to photograph him after all," Carter Nesbitt observed and slapped the provost

on the back. "But you still have a chance to become the man who photographed Molodnik's parrot."

"We'll see about that," the provost muttered and limped after the departing speaker in the direction of the parking lot. When Blanning emerged into the open air, the playwright was already halfway down the block. Molodnik strode rapidly in the direction of the Westwood Country Inn. The parrot rested backwards on his shoulders, its brooding eyes still focused on the provost.

f f f

For three days, the provost knelt on his flabby legs, his good eye pressed against the peephole. All that he could see of Molodnik's room were the threadbare sofa and the upper third of the coffee table. An inverse replica of his own chamber at the inn. During the night someone, presumably Molodnik, had removed the bowl of pears from the provost's frame of vision—a petty act of treachery that infuriated Blanning, for he remained uncertain whether the fruit were synthetic—and he now faced another tedious evening in which to contemplate the ragged antimacassars and anticipate a glimpse of the playwright.

Voyeurism is a taxing enterprise. Blanning found the demands of his new avocation daunting. One had to sleep, he acknowledged reluctantly, and even four hours of slumber permitted Molodnik to cross in front of the peephole unobserved on countless occasions. Then there were the exigent forays to the pizza shop on the corner and the all too frequent visits to the toilet. It was during just such intervals that Molodnik was liable to recline on the sofa without his bandana or remove the bowl of pears. In fact, Blanning thought he detected the impression of the playwright's gargantuan form on the tan cushions. He could not be certain. If one stares at an object long enough, he knew, it commandeers one's memory like a parasite.

On his first night at the inn, Blanning had ordered in *lo mein*. The effusive delivery man who came to his door reminded the provost of the peculiarity of his own circumstances. He was an elderly, emaciated courier in a fishing

cap. While the provost fumbled in his jacket for his wallet, the delivery man had followed him into the room and surveyed the quarters curiously. His eyes fell upon the camera. It rested on a tripod, inches from the peephole.

"Good view, Mister?" the interloper asked knowingly. He had engaged in his own antics at boarding school many decades before.

"I'm a nature photographer," the provost replied nervously. "The camera's for birds." A twenty dollar tip extricated him from the predicament. In the future, he determined, he would be more conscientious.

Three days later, he had still not seen Molodnik. Ironically, he could hear the playwright's daily routine through the paper-thin walls of the nineteenth-century Colonial. Molodnik paced. He turned on the faucet to take his medication. He fed the parrot. For nearly seventy-two hours, the playwright unwittingly held Blanning prisoner with a symphony of belching, urination, Czech phone conversations, late-night German radio broadcasts, and an intimate gurgling sound that Molodnik apparently produced for his own entertainment. Certain noises were conspicuous in their absence: television, sex, company. By midnight on Sunday, a thin veneer of dust covered the camera.

Blanning wiped his face with a handkerchief and debated the merits of a second peephole. As he did so, Molodnik's oversized form cast a foreboding shadow over the coffee table, a contorted silhouette that danced ominously along the sofa cushions with the lapping advance of a flash flood, and the playwright's naked torso quickly eclipsed the furniture. It approached slowly, an object resembling a picture frame tucked under one thick arm. The provost rapidly swung his camera into position. He held one hand against the shutter. The other he waved frenetically, anticipating the moment when Molodnik's face might dip into his field of view.

The provost rubbed his good eye with his index finger. When his gaze refocused, he found himself staring into a large, black eye—the eye of a pirate. The eye quickly re-

treated into a face and Blanning snapped the picture. Several seconds later, his vision having recovered from the flash, the provost recognized the captured visage: It stared at him blankly through its one good eye, Molodnik's coarse fingers visible around the edges of the mirror.

Jeanne Emmons

Vortex

We strolled the beach, a mile or so and back, under the climbing sun,
the waves curling and the dunes warming up with their gulls
lifting and settling like windblown plastic bags. Before us,
in the sky, came a thunderhead shaped like an anvil, but the sun
was on us and over us the blue. A funnel in the cloud spun
into relief, like something carved in a frieze,
long and thin, the paper cone
under the cotton candy,
standing out against
the cloud, another thing
entirely, behaving
in strange ways,
twisted like a
pastry bag,
spewing puffs
of sunlit cloud.
It moved with
the undulant look
of water going
down a drain,
compact,
solid as marble.
Breathless,
we tilted
our heads
to watch it
form,
twist,
dissipate,
never
touching
down.
We
ran out of the sun,
into great dollops of rain and the broom of thunder sweeping
over our sternums, towards the beach house on its stilts, fragile as a crane,
where the children lying asleep in their beds
seemed briefly to belong to someone else.

Kathlene Postma

Still Life in China

Before I left her,
I saw two cranes circling
over Chengdu, the red
crests on their heads flickering
in the smog like mouths
gasping for air.
They shook the branches
where they landed,
leaves straining like feathers
practicing for flight.
Gathering in the angles
of their bones, they balanced
on the tops of those trees,
tapped long beaks
against the grey silken sky,
and sang for a way.

Camille Dungy

Red Riding-Hood Inside

Before the beginning there was Eve,
pulled from the inside of Adam.

Anything can happen but a pregnant man, I chant.
Then I remember the pregnant man of Monreale,
his naked body carved into the cathedral's marble,
belly distended, thighs swollen. My, what big eyes he had.

So I am not surprised, opening my eyes in darkness,
to find myself in the foulness of you.
It is easy to be swallowed.
The throat is made to accommodate.

I must admit, I don't remember
the full circumstances behind my present condition.
Something about your body, intriguing
in its largeness. I think there was wine involved...

Another woman is here with me
but she is old and useless. Somebody's mother.
She thinks since we are already in your stomach
we should go for your heart. I am ignoring her.

My favorite coat is getting soggy. My shoes are ruined.
You liar. You didn't want to listen to me.
I will be born again soon. Cut free.
And my revenge will be to burden you with dead weight.

As I recall, this is not uncommon,
this emergence, whole, from wolves and whales and men.
I learn what those who came before me know.
Obedience. Not to veer from the designated path.

Body Cast

We are supposed to go to a movie, but we don't make it. We make a body cast instead. It's Joann's idea. "Think of it as an investment," she says. "I'll do a cast of your torso, paint it, and sell it to the gallery. You get half of the profits."

She sticks a knife into a cardboard box and slices the top open. Foot long strips of gauze are inside, specked with bits of plaster. It's the same kind of material the doctors used to set my arm after I jumped from the roof of my garage ages ago, with a lucky Cat's Eye marble under my tongue. When I hit the ground, my arm snapped and I swallowed the marble. Since then, I have lived through a heterosexual marriage and divorce, and have fallen in love with Jo.

Jo pulls a strip of gauze from the box. Particles of plaster dust scatter into the air. She claps her hands together and the dust spins toward the light above her head. When she turns to me, she is radiant as the particles of dust caught in the stream of light. "I want a body cast," she says. "From your neck to your knees." The front of her sweatshirt is stained with pastel-colored acrylics. Random splashes of paint overlap one another. The colors blend together so completely they do not appear to be separate colors at all.

The painting she worked on today rests on an easel in our living room: blades of cheat grass, a river curving, a sky which is red-brown-yellow-blue-green, trees the color of Greek olives. Jo folds back the collar of my blouse. As she kneads the tenseness from my neck, I feel as if I am a square of canvas resting on an easel, captured in an image that only she can see. She wears earrings of her own design, made from porcupine quills and glass beads. When she rests her head against the center of my chest, the earrings shimmer and chime, and finally fall silent. A thin arrrow of red paint traces the line of her jaw, a dab of yellow arches across her

cheekbones. War paint, I think, and raise my hand to touch it. I stop the motion before I reach the warm, damp paint, and drop my arms to my sides. As Jo meets my eyes, I understand that the war is not her own. It's mine.

Each morning, I trace my lips with Opal Red, go to work alongside men in dark-suits and Rush Limbaugh ties. I go to my parents' once a month for pot roast and fruit salad, and never once mention that Jo is the woman I love. My woman Jo's hair is light brown. Free-rolling, it wisps past her shoulders. A strand has fallen across her eyebrow. She lets it remain where gravity has taken it, as she will do with the tip of a paintbrush on canvas.

I take a tissue from my purse and kiss the lipstick off, hang my raincoat in the closet next to Jo's goosedown vest. In the living room/studio, her paints are stacked randomly inside an orange crate. A coffee can, stuffed with colored pencils and magic markers, rests on the windowsill. Next to it, a Roi-Tan cigar box is cluttered with empty bread bags. They are filled with sand, seashells, pressed flowers, vials of glitter, agates, and pine cones. In a ragged tobacco pouch she stores the seeds from food she has eaten—olives, figs, peaches—to be used as texture in murals. Surrounding the easel, the carpet is covered with a paint-stained plastic tarp. When I invited Jo to live with me three months before, I assured her that my apartment would split easily in two, half for her work, half for mine. As I look at the room, I am drawn toward her side where nothing has an order that is common to me. I want to walk on the plastic tarp where footsteps make a sound and leave a print.

A dab of purple paint comes to a V between Jo's forefinger and thumb. Beneath her short-cropped nails the paint is blue. On my own nails I wear a polish called Diamond Dew. Pressing the smooth oval of my fingernails against my lips, I ask, "What will you call the body cast?"

Jo smiles and shakes her head lightly. Her earrings *clitter, clitter, ting, ting*. "I need a name," I say. "I need a name to understand it, Jo."

As she unlatches the gold chain from my neck, there is a lightness to her gray eyes. "It's your body, Claire, your life."

I unbutton my blouse, step out of my skin, nylons, heels. Leaning against the counter, I cross my arms over my front while Jo fills a ceramic bowl with warm water. I unlatch my brassiere and let it slide to the kitchen tiles. As I lower myself onto the tabletop, I close my eyes. To protect my skin, Jo covers me with sheets of Saran Wrap. Her hands move lightly across my ribcage, settle on my waist. "Beautiful," she says.

The shadow of her body falls across my own. She dips a strip of gauze in the tepid water and I tremble when she spreads it across my breasts. As she smooths it with her fingertips, it begins to harden, molding to my form. Beneath the cast, my nipples are sharp as arrowheads.

Carnations

Neither the pathos
of the wild iris,
whimsy
of winter
pansies, nor the poppy's
seductive fragility.
They make no claims
of love
or apology.
Their colors
are festive fakes—
pink, yellow, even orange.
The stems thick
as ankles,
petals
like ragged paper
flags. The smell, too,
one more bland obsession.
But cut early
and kept in clear
water, carnations
can last a long time,
eternity, nearly.

The Woman with Two Left Feet Meets the Man Who's All Thumbs

There's a fortune waiting in the tabloids,
if they need it. They don't. Dancing is a problem,
but he couldn't pin the corsage anyway.
Mostly they sit together, quietly, a lifetime
finding one another. Neither looks forward
to angling through town or deep winter, glove weather.
He goes shopping for her, she shovels the drive.
It's sweet, equitable. Nature shapes both
generously. Watch them, through the window, rubbing
each other's parts in candlelight.

That's more than I can say for you, or me.

Pinochle Deck

These cards have advantage
over you. They are not alone.
The ace of spades will meet the ace
of spades. It can buy itself a beer.
It can find itself face-up on the table.
It can tell itself to relax while being shuffled.
The nine of diamonds can tell
the nine of diamonds that it is not to blame.
It can share its own contempt for the dealer
who bends its corners.

Separate the cards in two,
split the pairs. Put half on the windowsill
to yellow in too much light. Put half
in the back of a dark drawer by the sink.
Offer no visiting rights.
They're cruel acts that keep us breathing.
On a bright night in spring, invite some friends.
Serve wine. Then serve coffee.
Bring the deck together. Listen carefully
for small voices gasping at the sight of themselves.
Laugh. Then serve more wine.

Michael Cholewinski

Toccata and Fugue

toc-ca-ta *n.* A composition, usually for an organ or another keyboard instrument, in free-style with elaborate runs and harmonies. [*Ital. <fem. p. part. of toccare, to touch*]

and *conj.* 1. Together with or along with; also; in addition; as well as. Used to connect words, phrases, or clauses that have the same grammatical function in a construction. 2. Added to; plus; two and two makes four.

fugue *n.* 1. A polyphonic musical composition in which a theme or themes stated successively by a number of voices in imitation are developed contrapuntally. 2. A pathological condition during which one is apparently conscious of his actions but has no recollection of them after returning to a normal state. [*Fr.* < *Ital. fuga* < *Lat., flight.*]

a story *n.* An end for which all the words are put down. [< *Aristotle*]

f f f

David stepped out onto the deck with a tray of hamburger patties, buns, and beer in one hand and a freshly lit cigarette in the other. The crisp rush of the escaping gases from the can of beer being opened tore a small hole in the warm silence on the deck. A red and white can of Budweiser was shoved between me and the typewriter, and with a nod I reached for it and took it.

As he gave me the beer, Dave started telling me that he saw a yellow car the other night tearing around the big corner on the main road below. His voice stopped for a second, and then I heard the sizzle of patties as he put them on the barbecue grill behind me. I stopped and listened as he explained that our neighbor, Mr. Shimada, who was out watering his massive immaculately manicured lawn, screamed a catalog of vicious sounding Japanese babble at the driver

of the car. He said Mr. Shimada's face turned beet red as he raised his fist and screamed. Shimada's miniature wife finally came out and pointed out how embarrassingly loud he was being, and then they got into a royal shouting match. Dave said that by the end he figured that they were arguing about the lawn, though he couldn't be a hundred-percent sure because they were screaming at each other in Japanese. I assume he came to his conclusion by their body language. I never asked.

He said the police came by a little while later. We guessed that Shimada had probably called to give them a description or file a complaint. But it isn't really very clear, and we'll probably never really know for sure as we don't talk to our neighbors much.

I asked him for further details, but he was at a loss to give me anything other than this basic outline. He said it had all happened so fast that he couldn't recall all the fine points. On a whim, I asked him if he felt he was consciously or subconsciously blocking the details from his thoughts. He laughed and asked me, "What, like I even care? And besides, hell, it all happened so fast there's no way that I could catch every little thing, you know." I answered with the quip, "Well, time does travel at the speed of light, day or night." "Well, guess my big brain's just too slow to keep up with the world, man," he said as he walked back into the house with the tray.

f f f

Toccata and Fugue, music from the soundtrack of the movie *Fantasia*, plays on the reel-to-reel in the living room. The somber organ music mourns through valleys and peaks as it pours through the open sliding glass doors.

Three magnificent Lombardy Poplars nestled half-way up the far side of the canyon wall sway gently in the warm summer breeze, the late afternoon sunlight accentuating their lighter shade of green. I've noticed every so often that the swaying foliage on the hillside and the music fall in and out of harmony, and I wonder what the connection might be.

The music builds slowly to its many crescendos then

falls and fades soothingly.

On the bleached wooden slats of the deck sleeps Ray, David's cat. It's an uncontested fact in our house that Ray's as good an example of domestication as can be found. We all agree that he's either too inexperienced or too lazy to hurt anything, let alone kill like the other, wilder cats that prowl our neighborhood. This is kind of surprising, because the trees and bushes surrounding the house are full of birds, baby birds, singing birds, bird nests, you name it. Yet, in the cool of the morning and in the balm of the evening Ray sits patiently on the driveway slope and simply watches them. Simply sitting and watching, tail swishing lazily, the picture of fat, serene indifference.

Time, it seems, flows for animals, too, but it's apparent that Ray handles it much more effortlessly than humans do.

f f f

The young man walks up to his canary yellow Super-Sport and wrenches the door open. A lightning rush of adrenaline bolts through his body and shocks his senses silly as he bangs his head getting in. For an instant his mind is a total blank. After waiting a moment to clear his head he slams the door shut hard. The street is as quiet and empty as a shadow, but there is thunder and pure fear boiling in his heart from the unfinished argument with his mother, whom he has just left. All the windows of the car are down and the white vinyl seats gleam in the afternoon light. *Oregon, America's Wonderland* is hammered in cheerful yellow letters on the car's deep blue license plates.

Both of his sweaty hands grip the pearl white wheel. "Ho-ly shit!" he thinks wildly, uncontrollably. "What the fuck! What the fuck! What the fuck's she want me to become in such a hurry?" He bangs the steering wheel with both fists then rests his forehead on the top of the wheel and stares vacantly at the steering column, breathing deeply.

Fumbling with the keys, he brings the car's engine rumbling to life. It's a throaty rumble that vibrates up through the thin bucket-seats of the car, harmonizing with the chaos in his young body. But Pink Floyd's "Welcome to the Ma-

chine" suddenly thunders from the stereo and the boy jumps before his senses settle into the sound. He revs the engine repeatedly, enjoying the machined howl as it rips through the quiet of the neighborhood.

After a minute he rams the shift lever into first, pops the clutch as he jams his foot down hard on the accelerator bolting the car out into the narrow road and sending a shower of gravel and dust onto the nicely manicured lawn.

f f f

August shifts the bright yellow car into fourth gear and glances quickly at the speedometer as the radium covered needle edges slowly, rigidly toward the number one hundred. The gentleness of the summer canyon breeze is being whipped to a hair-tearing frenzy as it rushes through the open windows. He grins through clenched teeth, and with white knuckles clutching the wheel he presses the accelerator hard against the floorboard. "Come on, bitch! Let's fuckin' blooooooow this mother!" he screams violently into the furious noise and wind. The car, with its resonating howl of raw power, tears ever faster through the tranquil atmosphere of the canyon.

Great amounts of adrenaline, which his young body is producing in a rush to keep up with his reality, are roaring though his veins, electrifying his body, forcing and focusing his attention on the blur of asphalt rushing at him at a dizzyingly unreal speed. A humming, exhilarating vibration telegraphs from the seat of the car into his ass, edging his excitement closer to a Promethean burst of pleasure. Wild-eyed, he sneers at his feat with clenched teeth. The roar of the engine and music seem endless as seconds tick by.

f f f

The hamburger patties sizzle as they touch the hot grill of the hibachi. White smoke roils into the summer air, vanishing in a crowdless magic act. David, letting the burgers sizzle away, crouches down and talks lovingly to his lounging cat, Ray.

The rest of us have pegged Ray with a variety of names like "butt head" and "bone head" and "wharf rat." It's not

that we hate him, because we don't. It's just that we don't share the same emotional bond David does for the animal, a bond that comes from enormous vet bills and the tolerance of endlessly shedding hair. It's his cat, not ours.

Ray lies there, eyes staring blankly, tail swishing lazily, basking in the floating pool of late afternoon sunlight and sudden shower of attention. He purrs heavily from the affection being lavished upon him. It seems to me that for him life, for all practical purposes, is good.

From the road that feeds down from Spencer's Butte comes a menacing noise. It grows steadily louder as it approaches. From our vantage point, we're soon able to see a yellow car zip from one break in the trees to the next. At first it's kind of odd matching the steady, throaty noise with the spotty appearances of the car, but that quickly intensifies our absorption in the scene. David stands slowly and looks toward me. Our eyes communicate what we both realize, that the car can't possibly make the coming corner going so godamned fast.

The moment it goes behind another tree we hear an instantaneous shift from engine noise to the wild howl of tires sliding on the asphalt. A sharp jolt races up everyone's spine. Ray's body flicks alert and fizzes with tension. In the instant the car becomes visible again, I catch a glimpse of a white, panic-stricken face behind the wheel.

f f f

The pinkish hamburger patties sizzle as they touch the hot grill of the greasy black hibachi. Having finished placing the burgers on the grill, David bends down to talk to his cat, Ray. The comically overweight cat is stretched out in an oval pool of sunlight floating on the corner of the deck, sleeping, oblivious to David's words. I sit and watch them not communicate, and am reminded that theirs is a pretty common communication situation that often exists between most of the humans I know.

We can hear a loud automobile approaching from the upper part of the canyon. Suddenly, through a break in the large trees lining the canyon road we are able to see it, a

bright yellow '67 Malibu Super-Sport. From my vantage point I can see that the driver is unaware of a young girl chasing a cat across the street. Her mother, oblivious to the oncoming car, sits chatting away with some man on the cement porch step of their run-down house.

The car is racing down the road way too fast to stop. There's a sudden peal of skidding tires, and for an instant I think I can see the driver's panic-stricken face behind the wheel.

The young girl tenses and remains transfixed in the middle of the road, staring at the oncoming car.

f f f

"Should I tell him that I think I'm falling in love with him?" she asks herself. Love.

"I don't want to be crowding him, though we've come on to each other so damned strong it's pretty difficult not to think. But it's been only two weeks. I'm sure it's on his mind, too. I mean, I can tell that he's been drinking a lot today. Maybe he's been giving it a bit of thought. Wish he wouldn't drink so. Is it going to slow down or get worse if we really go hard at it? Listen to you, hard at it. Love. Love? But there's always something in his eyes, some kind of distance, like now. Maybe he's thinking about me. What the hell do you want, woman?"

"Lisa, be a love and run across to the box and check the mail for mum, would you now?"

"Am I so old? But a child and all. Jesus, nine years. To think about it, it's not all that much. I mean, he's got to be thinking about it. Maybe more than me. Love. God, I hope that he doesn't just think of me as another of his college 'women-friends.' I deserve more than that. I mean, I want more. Godamnit!"

f f f

The radium coated speedometer needle edges its way toward the magically full number one-hundred. August, his hair flying every which way in the tormented wind, knows full well the danger of the curve at the bottom of the canyon road, but is sure he knows his Super-Sport like the back of

his hand. He's sure he knows the exact moment to begin braking to keep from crashing through the tiger-striped guard rail and sailing over the edge of the cliff to a certain death.

A young girl darts out from between two parked autos, and he jams the brakes hard. In less than time itself nauseating regret is born in his privileged consciousness.

f f f

Its walls having been freshly painted white some weeks before, the court gleams intensely bright. The blonde maple floor, smooth as a morning pond, offers up the blurred reflection of a young man crouching with his racquet, anticipating, searching for any clue in his opponent's stance, his serve, the direction of his delivery that might facilitate his impending response. Drops of sweat dot the floor between his outstretched legs. The shrieking squeaks of feet sliding into position echo and die in instants. As he opens and closes his grip on the racquet, he rapidly squints the sweat from his eyes. His body is so tense and his concentration so focused, he's not even aware of his upper lip twitching like the throat on a warbler. He tries to replenish his body with much needed oxygen by drinking in deep gulps of air, in spite of the fact that the still air of the court is fused with a stifling mixture of fresh paint and warm, humid body odor.

f f f

"I think that I might be falling in love with you," she says as she bends her head downward. He holds his breath while looking at the thin white scalp line that splits her head neatly in half, and realizes that this situation has all the makings of another of her freak-store wig-out, I've-seen-God passion storms. He asks himself, "Just what the hell is love, anyway? And what the hell does she think it is? No! I don't even want to know! And Christ, I mean, is there even a definition?" He used to think he knew, but the older he gets and the more women he is with pushes that knowledge further and further into such ambiguous territory in his mind that by now, at the ripe old age of 27, he's unable to tell the difference between true love, or sex, or just holding hands and feeling good.

For a moment it seems as though she's going to cry because he takes that split instant too long to respond to her overture. He hesitates, and there is meaning in that.

A part of him wants to stay and hear her out, out of politeness and simple curiosity about what else she might concoct and tell him, but the rest of him wants to wrench the moment royally with some inane utterance or action that would surely doom the day and all those that might follow, thus relieving them both of the opportunity of continuing or repeating this mendacious drama. He adjusts his gaze just slightly over her left shoulder to a small apple tree nearby and begins to wonder about the newly ripening apples massed on its tiny branches. "They just come out of the branches," he thinks to himself like a child. "Just like that!"

Having delivered her emotional ordinance, her eyelids raise slowly to survey the results and catches his elsewhere. "He's thinking about it all, there's that contemplative look in his eyes," she thinks, sure that he's giving the matter some hard consideration, maybe sorting out the flippant, trivial emotions from the serious ones that she assumes he's battling with.

f f f

The racquetball court gleams intensely bright, having been painted white some weeks before. The heavy presence of body odor and humidity mixes with the smell of fresh paint and lingers in the warm, still air of the court.

The young man crouches with his racquet, anticipating, searching for any kind of clue in his opponent's stance, his serve, the direction of his delivery. He is on the very edge of either winning or losing, a time when every possible thing counts. He has yet to score a victory over his opponent in many months of play. A fine trickle of sweat tickles down his flushed cheek, as he flirts with the possibility before him.

The score stands at twenty-seven to twenty-seven, their closest game ever. The young man grips his racquet nervously. He is tense, ready for the kill.

f f f

The speeding yellow car swerves completely sideways in an attempt to miss the large cat that has darted out from between the two parked autos. A small laughing girl innocently chases the cat into the road as it skitters between the two cars.

There is a howl of skidding tires as the driver turns the wheel frantically in an attempt to regain control. The cat leaps to safety as the girl stares doe-eyed at the car and bites her fingernail.

f f f

"Godamnit! I've got to stop her from falling in love with me!" he thinks in near panic. He blurts to her, "I'm just not ready!" And then quickly looks away to the small apple tree across the yard bursting forth with fruit. But in the same instant he thinks to himself, "Just what the fuck is that supposed to mean?"

Sex.

The young man leans over and kisses the woman as her daughter, Lisa, comes into the room. He sloshes some wine onto his lap and all three of them laugh. He's all jacked-up at the prospect of getting laid, but isn't sure whether he can get it up or not, as he's been drinking beer all day long with the boys at the barbecue. The fizzing hormonal cocktail coursing through his veins tells him one thing, but as he looks into her eyes he suddenly feels compelled to make some decisions about what he's really feeling for her, perhaps sort out the flippant emotions from the serious ones.

He stares and thinks, "Love her? Do I want to love her? It's the sex. Most of the time. Maybe love. What the fuck is love? What the fuck's it matter? I mean, after all, no one's promised anyone anything, and no one's hurting anyone here." The young man doesn't want to think about it, about anything.

Lisa, hands behind her back, leans against the door jamb with her head down slightly and fidgets awkwardly, smiling innocently, begging for attention.

f f f

Magic in nature. The driver of the yellow car turns the wheel frantically in a futile attempt to regain control as it slides toward the curb as though on ice. The skidding tires pour a hoarse howl and thick clouds of white smoke into the clear canyon air.

From my vantage point on the deck, I already know what is going to happen. I think it amazing how quickly one can come to a conclusion about a situation and at the same time be so entirely sure of its validity.

Ray runs, then stops; runs, stops; slinking, searching, sensing danger from the commotion, wholly aware of his position in life.

No escape.

Ringside seats.

Our neighbor, Mr. Shimada, a recent immigrant from Japan, who's "Just 62!" is out watering his beautiful green lawn. The word that best describes his yard is "massive." In fact, he looks like a child in the middle of it, holding a bright green hose, smiling. From where I'm sitting across the street, he appears to be transfixed by the sight of the yellow car as it magically slides toward him and his massive, beautiful lawn.

f f f

The young man changes the subject because it's the only way that he knows out of the awkward moment. "She might blow a fuse," he thinks, "but I've gotta do something." To salvage the possibility of continuing the relationship, which really means of continuing his easy access to good sex, he concocts an explanation of past unpleasantries. He thinks that she'll understand, and this confidence causes him to remember a term from a recent Shakespeare class, *coup de theatre*. After he finishes he notices her body relax a little and thinks foolishly, "She's under control." Silence prevails on the porch as they both stare into the draw situation.

As if by magic, a pretty little girl appears on the porch, swings one arm up to the wooden four-by-four support, leans her face against her hand and asks him if he'd like

something cool to drink. The woman's somber face is averted, and he rests his whole being for an instant. He prays inwardly for the sudden timely appearance of Lisa, "Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! Anything to break this scene!" He changes his tone to suit the child and accepts her offer. But it's really nothing more than another example of wishful juggling on his part, something he's very practiced at. Like most people, he has absolutely no idea of what the immediate future holds, he's simply happy for the momentary respite from the ever-mutating present, however illusory.

f f f

I watch the yellow car as it slams into the curb, its driver wrenched half out of his open window in the violent paroxysm of motion. The car flips over the sidewalk crazily and makes its first contact with our neighbor's yard. My first thought is, "First down!"

Our neighbor, Mr. Shimada, is out enjoying the simple task of watering his massive green lawn and is mere meters from the yellow mass of metal as it leaps the curb in its riotous, silent tango with gravity. As if by silent command, Mr. Shimada's hose drops from his right hand, which snaps to his left chest.

A shower of dirt and chunks of turf are flung into the air, leaving great brown ruts gouged in the uniform green expanse. One of the car's front wheels is snapped off at the curb and is hurled through Mr. Shimada's ornately carved front door, snapping it off at the hinges.

I thought that for the shortest of moments each of us on the deck was amused by the sight of the acrobatic car sailing past Mr. Shimada, who appeared to be pledging allegiance to the flag, hand gripping his chest, head shot back, an impassioned look frozen on his beet red face. But just as quickly I realized, when asked to recall something, how difficult it is to remember exactly what one was thinking about the very instant before.

I'd go so far as to say that it's often difficult to remember exactly what one was thinking not only the moment before, but the hour, the day, or even the month before.

These days things get blended together somehow, and for the most part it becomes okay. I used to think that suppression or indifference caused this, but more and more I'm inclined to think that it's probably just life in the bughouse in general.

f f f

The young man quickly changes the subject because it is the only way that he knows to avoid the scene becoming ugly and unpleasant. He immediately launches into a stirring emotional plea, which he feels she'll be compelled to accept. He explains to her about some past unpleasant experiences he's had with women, and about what he thinks his fears are about the present relationship. In all actuality, he hasn't a clue in hell as to what the truth is concerning his current emotions.

After the fact, he writes the incident off like the many he's had before, in a Romanesque, victorious manner. Mentally, he calls it a *coup de theatre*, which translates loosely into 'something which produces a sensational effect.' "She seems under control," he thinks wrongly as he notices her gaze drift to a small apple tree nearby.

f f f

The ball sails past and the young man lunges for it with amazing determination and dexterity, not wanting his opponent to score. Adrenaline has thoroughly permeated his body, and he is sweating like a proverbial pig.

With the racquet's sweet spot he drills the ball hard, sending it low to the opposite side of the court. It is a calculated attempt to make his opponent waste energy faster by forcing him to dash around the court in pursuit. The young man's opponent has to stretch hard to snag and save the shot. "There's no waitin' in this game!" the young man thinks in an instant.

The ball is a blur of motion, low to the court floor, difficult to control. The young man wonders if he should even be playing this advanced an opponent, but in the next instant his thoughts are of how much he is relishing the challenge of capturing the winning trophy.

He's planted himself in the center of the court waiting for a chance to hit the ball high causing it to hang for a while so that he can catch his breath.

Both men are so thoroughly absorbed in the present action that they couldn't tell you their addresses if their lives depended on it. This is as close to instinct as they ever get in their daily lives.

f f f

The music crashes from a scherzando in a deafening, rolling peal; and then there is a subtle, relaxed harmony that seems to keep time with the three Lombardy Poplars swaying in the gentle summer breeze across the narrow green canyon. Night is falling slowly, the sky paling to violet.

Dave has just brought out his telescope with its long, thin oak legs, and has put it on the far corner of the deck. An ice-cold, sweating beer feels damned good in my hand, and the savory smell of meat cooking on the barbecue rolls up to meet me as I sit at the typewriter and ponder. "This," I think, "is August in Oregon."

f f f

The yellow '67 Super-Sport crashes across Mr. Shimada's freshly watered lawn, leaving great, neatly gouged ruts in it. After smashing into Shimada's parked Mercedes Benz the car comes to a smoking halt. The sound of abrupt silence burns into the canyon neighborhood.

August fumbles in his attempt to open the mangled door. There is bright blood spattered across his boyish face. Mr. Shimada runs frantically toward the wrecked car and wrenches the disfigured door open. August stares at him and blathers obscene, partial sentences, as if drunk. Mr. Shimada, hands covered with sticky blood, stares transfixed at the sight before him.

f f f

The young man serves the game ball with animalistic vigor, and his opponent returns it with an equally savage force. Both men are dizzyingly tired, but the young man's opponent knows that he will never hear the end of it if he allows this victory.

They are both running hard, both taxing their limits. In a quick shuffle across the court to return the shot, the young man's opponent slips on some sweat and falls. Time, good old predictable time clicks by at the speed of light.

As the young man's opponent sails down to the shiny court boards, he knows full well the opportunity open to the young man to nail the winning shot to the far side of the court. He relents, and relaxes into his fall.

A Romanesque sense of victory rushes through the young man's mind and body as he hammers the winning shot low to the far corner of the court.

f f f

Large warm raindrops fall as the lovers lie in each other's arms on the plush, salmon-colored bed. The fresh, earthy smell of underbrush made wet by the brief afternoon thundershower drifts in through the open window.

The young man is a little thirsty and so gets up and walks to the kitchen to retrieve the bottle of wine he left on the counter the night before. As he walks through the living room he notices that the house has been cleaned immaculately.

He gulps down a large glass of wine in the kitchen before getting another glass and returning with the bottle to the bedroom. She lies on the bed watching him as he walks toward her. Her eyes are suffused with the warmth of satisfaction and calm.

The young man knows all too well what it is that he has to tell her. But it has to be done. He has convinced himself that the situation has gotten completely out of control for the both of them. There's nobody to blame. Things just got out of control, which means that they let their relationship cross that line of seriousness even though they knew that it wouldn't last. Trepanned; but whose fault is it anyway? In the end, he thinks dryly, is it always necessary to point a finger to find fault, to feel justice?

f f f

You know, it's all pretty damned confusing. Hell, I'm even starting to think that the *Toccata and Fugue* has fused

my mind. I mean, if that's possible.

A benevolent sun drifts overhead in a pale blue sky and showers down onto me as I sit staring across the small canyon that I call home. Behind me on the deck sits a greasy little black hibachi, silently pulsing menacing waves of heat onto my bare calves. Why I don't move nags at me as I am continually forced to shift my legs in search of relief.

I suppose to the casual observer it might seem that not a hell of a lot is going on in this peaceful little place, but nothing could be further from the truth. Once again I am affirmed of the fact that deception abounds in life, both by nature and by intention.

f f f

In the room there are sobs of disbelief, confusion, and chaos. Shortly before, a warm rain began to fall ending a fifty-two day dry spell, an area record.

A young girl runs from her mother's closed bedroom door to her own room and throws herself onto her bed. Her throat is so choked-up that it begins to hurt, and her large doe-eyes burn with fear and pure innocent passion. She buries her head in the mound of stuffed animals at the head of her bed as a torrent of tears floods from her eyes.

f f f

David comes out onto the deck carrying the hamburger patties and buns on a white plate. I can hear the crisp rush of escaping gasses as he opens a can of beer for me. It's a welcome sound. It's been another long, hot day. The sounds of *Toccata and Fugue*, playing on the stereo in the living room, drift through the open sliding glass door.

All day long I've been watching three tall trees on the canyon wall facing our house swaying in unison, and I comment upon them to Dave. He tells me that they are Lombardy Poplars. How he knows, I don't ask. Several times during the day I've noticed that their lateral swaying has been in time with the tempo of the music, which happens to be slowly rising and falling. I have to admit that more than once I've been transfixed by all the sensory input surrounding me.

Ray, David's cat, is asleep on the deck resting up for whatever it is that cats do at night, though in Ray's case that probably isn't much.

It's occurred to me that maybe I could bring Dave's telescope out and have a look at those trees more closely. I've been seeing birds fly in and out of them all day long. They might be nesting, or something.

f f f

I sit and watch as our neighbor, Mr. Shimada, completes his yard chores in the dim light of dusk. He walks to his front door in sandaled feet, opens it, reaches inside and switches on his porch light, a bright yellow globe mounted on the black siding.

Our barbecue is nearly out, but in the cooler night air its slight output of heat is still discernible on my bare legs. I step off my stool and notice that Ray, David's cat, is no longer on the deck but has been let outside and is now on the slanted driveway below, sitting. He might be waiting for something, but I think it's more likely that he's just staring off into the bushes at nothing in particular, unconsciously killing time.

The traffic in the intersection below our house has quieted to an occasional car, white lights looming and then gone, small, red lights fading around the tree-crowded corner. Aside from the occasional piping sounds of children laughing as they play hide-and-seek, all is still and silent in the evening air. I am almost tempted to say that things seem natural.

f f f

As I focus the telescope, I first see the tops of the Lombardy Poplars across the canyon sway in unison, and then I raise it up to catch a magnificent view of Jupiter with its brilliant orange bands and bright moons all in a row.

A sudden cool, silent breeze brushes across the deck, fanning the dying coals of the barbecue cherry red. I am chilled slightly as I hear the scuffing of some of the papers piled next to my typewriter. I realize that if I plan on staying outside much longer that I'm going to have to put some-

thing warmer on.

A second breeze picks up several of the sheets of paper from the messy stack and sails them quietly over the railing. They drift down toward the darkened driveway effortlessly, fluttering or swinging pendulum-like, finally scratching and skittering to rest, some face up, some down. Ray tenses at the sudden unexpected noises. He carefully walks over to one and sniffs it, then walks away to resume his serene vigil of the bushes lining the drive.

Looking through the small eyesight, I realize that I can't remember half the things I wrote about during the course of the day, not that remembering would change a hell of a lot. It's not as though it's a very pressing matter, I think.

I can see Jupiter's moons.

Among Cowboys

I was the one who didn't pray after
getting crabs. I became Cocteau

in my college years, meanwhile at
the ranch: bills, sorrow and wives

of friends waited for me. And a few
husbands too. I could out-polka

even the Polish priest who started
a dude ranch that went bust. An Indian

friend had bedpan duty at a local
mental hospital, cowboys on Prozac.

He would siphon gas from the cars
of visitors, and we'd six pack it in

high country. He hated cowboys, and
he refused to believe I was one because

I played Russian Roulette with him—when
we got bored, which was after payday.

Contributors' Notes

Jacob M. Appel lives in New York.

Rane Arroyo is the author of *Columbus's Orphan* and *The Singing Shark*, which was awarded the 1997-8 Carl Sandburg Poetry Prize. That same year, Arroyo won a Push-cart Prize and the Stonewall Books National Chapbook Contest. He is currently an assistant professor of creative writing at the University of Toledo.

Kami Blood, whose "Sea Nymph" is featured on the cover, is a student in the art department at the University of Idaho.

Gaylord Brewer teaches creative writing at Middle Tennesse State University where he also edits *Poems & Plays.* He has published three chapbooks of poetry and a book, *Presently a Beast*, which appeared in 1996. He was recently awarded a grant at the Fundación Valparaíso in Spain.

Michael Cholewinski writes to us from Japan, where he no doubt wonders at raw fish and considers Oregon from afar.

Camille Dungy recently moved from North Carolina to Boston, where she hopes her mail will catch up with her.

Jeanne Emmons's book, *Rootbound*, is forthcoming from New Rivers Press and she recently won the Minnesota Voices Project Competition in poetry. Emmons currently teaches English at Briar Cliff College where she is poetry editor of the *Briar Cliff Review.*

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A native of Lexington, Kentucky, **M. Hunter Hayes** currently lives with his wife in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, where he is enrolled in the creative writing program at the University of Southern Mississippi's Center for Writers.

Dianna Henning received her MFA from Vermont College and has recently appeared in *South Dakota Review* and *Pleiades*, among others. She has work currently published or forthcoming in *Poems and Plays* #5 and *The Iowa Source*.

Reamy Jansen teaches English at Rockland Community College (SUNY), is a contributing editor to *The Bloomsbury Review of Books*, and a founding editor of *Radical Teacher*. "Available Light" is part of a collection-in-progress of personal essays about fathers and sons, generations, and mortality.

Allison Eir Jenks is a James Michener Fellow in the University of Miami's MFA program, where she also teaches creative writing and is editor-in-chief of *Mangrove*. Her first book, *Liquid in Love*, was published in 1995 by Aegina Press, and she was recently nominated for the Masters Literary Award by Center Press.

Clark Karoses was born in Wisconsin and grew up in northern Idaho. He is currently enrolled at the University of Idaho where he is "trying to get an MFA."

Brian Kerr-Jung has published work in *Onthebus*, *The Cresset*, and other publications. He served as an editor for *The Cream City Review* and currently teaches writing at Cleveland State University and Lakeland Community College in northeastern Ohio.

Sandra Kohler's poems have recently appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *West Branch*, *The American Poetry Review*, and the *Women's Review of Books*. Her book of poems, *The Country of Women*, was published in 1995 by Calyx Books.

Mary MacGowan is studying for a Master's degree in the Humanities at Drew University, and her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Array*, *Candlelight*, *Light: A Poetry Review*, and *Writing For Our Lives*. She lives in New Jersey.

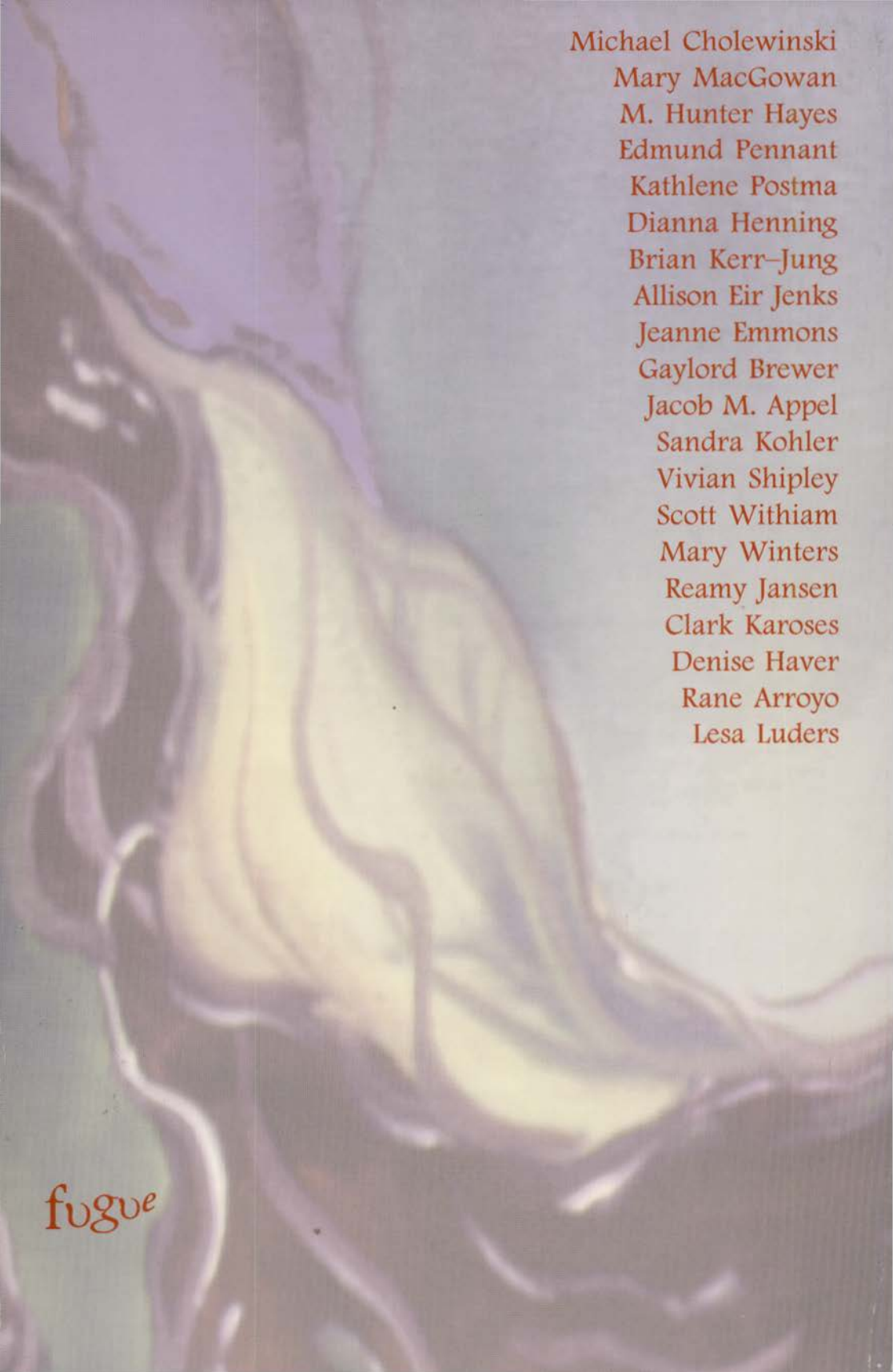
Edmund Pennant's fifth poetry book, *Askance and Strangely: New and Selected Poems*, was published by Orchises Press in 1993. His work has garnered a fellowship at Yaddo and he served as Resident Poet with Honors Cadets at West Point. He teaches at Adelphi University in New York.

Kathlene Postma has placed poetry and fiction in the *Hawai'i Review*, *Beloit Fiction Journal*, and *Clockwatch Review*. She has a Ph.D. in Creative Writing from the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee, and teaches fiction writing at Mississippi State University.

Editor of *Connecticut Review* and a professor at Southern Connecticut State University, **Vivian Shipley** has won numerous awards. Her book *Devil's Lane* was published in 1996 by Negative Capability Press and was nominated for that year's Pulitzer Prize. *How Many Stones*, her 1997 The Devil's Millhopper Contest-winning chapbook, is forthcoming.

The poems of **Mary Winters** have appeared in *Commonweal* and *Quarterly West*, among other magazines. Her chapbook *Grace Itself Invisible* was issued as a competition prizewinner, and in 1996 her book *A Pocket History of the World* was published by Nightshade Press.

Scott Withiam lives in Wareham, Massachusetts, where he co-edits *The Onset Review*. He is the winner of *The Sandhills Review's* Ronald H. Bayes Poetry Prize and his work was nominated for a Pushcart Prize this year. He has work forthcoming from *Cimarron Review* and *Harvard Review*, among others.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Mary Winters
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fugue