

No. 32

Winter - Spring 2007

FUGUE

\$8.00



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The University of the South

The University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee, is the home of this venerable quarterly, begun in 1892. It is a distinguished traditional literary magazine devoted to British and American fiction, poetry, and reviews, as well as essays in criticism and reminiscence. Those published in the *Review's* pages include T. S. Eliot, Dylan Thomas, Wallace Stevens, Flannery O'Connor, Mary Gordon, Andre Dubus, and more recently Wendell Berry, Fred Chappell, Denis Donoghue, Elizabeth Spencer, Grace Schulman, Louis Rubin, and Sam Pickering.

Published quarterly in Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall.
Volume 114 (2006).

Prepayment is required. **Annual subscriptions:** \$25.00, individuals; \$20.00, students (with copy of student I.D.); \$33.00, institutions. **Foreign postage:** \$7.00, Canada & Mexico; \$7.00, outside North America. **Single-issue price:** \$8.00, individuals; \$8.00, institutions. Payment must be drawn on a U.S. bank in U.S. dollars or made by international money order. **Sales tax:** Residents of Connecticut, D.C., Georgia, and Maryland add applicable sales tax. For orders shipped to Canada add 7% GST (#124004946RT).

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P.O. Box 19966
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Summer 2004

VOLUME 114, NUMBER 3



Now Published by THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY PRESS

EJHJ2006

The friends that have I do it wrong
Whenever I remake a song,
Should know what issue is at stake:
It is myself that I remake.

—William Butler Yeats

FUGUE

200 Brink Hall
University of Idaho
P.O. Box 441102
Moscow, Idaho 83844-1102

This issue is dedicated to the memory

Of

William Clark Styron, Jr.

(1925-2006)

FUGUE

Winter - Spring 2007, Vol. 32

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Fugue (ISSN 1054-6014) is a journal of new literature edited by graduate students of the University of Idaho's English and Creative Writing programs. *Fugue* is made possible by funding from the University of Idaho English Department and Creative Writing Program and is published biannually in the winter and summer.

Subscriptions are \$8 for a sample, individual copy, \$14 for 1 year (2 issues), \$25 for 2 years (4 issues), or \$35 for 3 years (6 issues); institutional subscriptions are \$22 for 1 year, \$40 for 2 years, or \$55 for 3 years. Make checks payable to *Fugue*. Add \$4 per year for international subscriptions. For back issues, write to *Fugue* at the University of Idaho, English Department, 200 Brink Hall, Moscow, ID 83844-1102.

Submissions are accepted September 1 through May 1 (postmark dates). All material received outside this period will be returned unread. Please address submission to the appropriate editor and send with SASE to *Fugue*, English Department, 200 Brink Hall, University of Idaho, Moscow, ID 83844-1102. All contributors receive payment and two complimentary copies of the journal. Please send no more than four poems, two short-shorts, one story, or one essay at a time. Submissions in more than one genre should be mailed separately, each containing an individual SASE. We will consider simultaneous submissions (submissions that have been sent concurrently to another journal), but we will not consider multiple submissions. All multiple submissions will be returned unread. Once you have submitted a piece to us, wait for a response on this piece before submitting again.

Cover art, "One View" by Robert Carter, 2006.

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Printed by Houghton Boston in conjunction with University of Idaho Printing and Design. Distributed internationally by Bernhard DeBoer and Ingram Periodicals.

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—From the Editors—

We would like to thank all who have contributed their work in this issue of *Fugue* and extend our gratitude to the staff, our subscribers, and the University of Idaho. Thank you to our readers for your continued support and enthusiasm for the creative work published in *Fugue*. In Robert Carter's illustration *One View* we are asked to consider multiple perspectives within the same image. We hope that this issue of *Fugue* satisfies the reader's quest to imagine the many possibilities within each piece. The work here is challenging and vigorous; expertly crafted; fresh. But most importantly there is something at stake in each of the stories, poems, and essays included here. These writers engage in a process of discovery, and what is more perilous, more beautiful, than exploring the un-known territories and excavating the un-mined depths of the humanity around us? So what must be appreciated, then, is the risk involved in such an endeavor, because the things we often find are unsettling and difficult to reconcile. But luckily for us, for you, the writers in this issue refuse to dumb-down—to dilute—the desperation with which most of us live, and yet there are moments of inexplicable beauty, revelation, and connection in the work you are about to read, and the effect of such a stunning balance will compel you to read on, to read more, and we hope that you do, because not reading is the most dangerous thing of all.

Justin Jainchill and Sara Kaplan

Alan Harawitz

The Day I Met Ava Gardner

Catering vehicles, spotlights, cameras resting
on tripods, saw horses blocking off streets.

Maggie sniffing everything
in her path with great urgency.

Burgess Meredith, Christopher Walken,
Jose Ferrer, Eli Wallach.

The extras in costume~
many with odd deformities,
limbs growing in different and unexpected directions.

Maggie staring and star-struck as any.
Movie-star energy permeating the air.

Suddenly *she* appears amidst the brownstone mansions,
middle-aged but still beautiful and oh-so-glamorous.

“Such a lovely dog. May I...”

And with that
Ava Gardner
reached down removed her gloves
and petted my dog.

*The film was *The Sentinel*—1977

Mariposa Girls

Last year all the girls at the Mariposa figure skating club wore dance skirts on the ice: sheer pastel fabric wrapped around tiny waists, fluttering as they kicked into axels and toe loops, billowing like parachutes as they tucked their frail arms against flat torsos and pressed their boots together, delicate in flight.

This year, the girls wear nothing. No skirts. No leotards. No tights. They skate naked, wind nipping against their skin.

They gave their skates up also, unscrewed the blades from their boots and drilled them right into their feet. Three screws in the heel, two up front on the ball of the foot. Just as one would mount them to wood, secured tight against flesh and bone. They say this way it's easier to point their toes in the air, easier to feel their blades dig into the ice.

It all started with the girl with the long dark ponytail pulled back so tight it stretched her eyes. She couldn't land a double axel, had worked on it for years. She would stroke hard around the corners, a complete lap around the ice building up speed. She would pull back her arms and kick up strong. Good timing. Good position. Good height. The rotation was a complete two and a half revolutions. Her shoulders were perfectly square. But each time her toe touched down for the landing, her blade slid out from under her body, knocking her hard to the ice—falls that dampened her tights a dark wet brown and burned the palms of her hands pink.

The coaches said, "Something is wrong. Something has to change if you're going to get this jump." What they meant was weight training or a different brand of boots. They didn't mean this.

But this is what the girl did. She shaved all the hair off her body, even the hair off her head. She took her father's drill from the tool shed, sterilized the screws, and lined the blades up on her feet. Then zip zip zip, she sent five screws into each foot and slipped a skate guard over the blades. She went to bed bald and naked and in the morning appeared like this at the rink.

The first half hour on the ice, she seemed a bit shaky, probably the bones adjusting to the screws, her bare body getting used to the cold. She came off the ice flushed, her skin glistening wet from falling again and again. Her coach slipped a coat over her shoulders, but the girl shrugged it away. She swallowed hungry gulps from the water fountain, then went straight back to the ice. By the twelfth try she landed that double axel. Dwayne, the Zamboni man, said it was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen.

She landed fifteen more that day, perfectly cloned specimens, a jump she would never let go of again. Her body had memorized it. It was engrained in her muscles, her bones, her skin.

She moved on from doubles to triples, as easily as a runner shifts from a jog to a run. She nailed all of them, even the triple lutz. The arc of the landing was smooth and breathless, her leg extending in a stunning line from toe to chin. She stroked back and forth across the ice, sweeping into jumps that ascended above the boards. The mothers let out whoops from the stands, shouted "Again! Again!" At that moment, she became the daughter of all of them, this beautiful creature who could do magnificent tricks.

By the end of the session, all the other girls had stopped skating and were lined up against the boards to watch. They sipped silently from their water bottles and wiped their runny noses on the back of their gloves. They were witnesses of a new breed of skater, a strange species: hairless and unconfined at the ankles, jumping higher and further than ever before.

By the end of the month there were a dozen of them, bootless girls with blades permanently affixed to their feet, spinning quadruple and quintuple jumps never before seen. The other girls left, the ones who weren't willing to drill blades into their bones, who wanted to keep their hair, their skirts, their tights. Some went to other ice rinks. Some switched to hockey. Most moved on to different hobbies: to clarinets and pianos, to horseback riding and thespian club.

The ones who made it became skating prodigies overnight. They swept the medals at Sectionals and Nationals, but were disqualified at Worlds.

"No nakedness on the ice," the international judges ruled. "This isn't the Garden of Eden. They must cover themselves with sequins and tights."

By that time, their flesh had started changing color. A dark gray spread through their fingers and toes, permanent frostbite setting in. The tips of their appendages were almost black, the skin fading gray as it went up their ankles and wrists.

"We'll just paint the rest of their bodies," the mothers said. "Skating dresses are so thin anyway, the judges will never know."

They hired artists to blend paint with the gray of the frostbite, spreading unitards on their daughters with blue and silver swirls. To finish the effect, they sewed sequins onto their skin for sparkle and sprinkled glitter over their heads. They were the most beautiful skaters, like snow fairies, icicles stuck to their eyelashes, their cheeks a pale shimmering blue. And so they went on winning all the medals—while the tissue in their feet went numb, while the tips of their fingers went dead.

Every so often a skater would disappear. There would be whispers of amputation, but the word was never spoken out loud. The Mariposa club became a mecca, an arena of pale bald pixies spinning through the air. Every girl in America wanted to be a Mariposa girl. They had seen them on TV. They knew Mariposa girls were pretty. They knew Mariposa girls always won. And so they were probably watching the night of the skating gala when one of the pixies fell.

It was the very beginning of her program, only the second jump. On the landing of the first one, she wobbled, and the audience gasped. This breed of skater didn't lose focus. This breed of skater didn't fall. She held onto that landing, but everyone could tell something wasn't right. Her blades were bent below her, loose and jiggling around. Still she set up her quintuple axel, pulled back her arms and threw herself into the air. When she came down, her ankle tipped sideways and the screws sliced through the top of her foot. She picked herself up and tried to keep going. But the flesh of her foot came open. There was nothing left to stand on, and she fell back against the ice. She lay there not moving while they called for a gurney to take her away. Now she was nobody's daughter, bald and naked, they could hardly tell who she was.

She didn't scream. She didn't cry. There wasn't even any blood. Just a wet shadow that melted around her body, marking where she'd been. **F**

Brought to You by the Letter Ox, Or: Why I Want My Son to Remain Illiterate

The letter A probably started as a pictogram of an ox head in Egyptian hieroglyphs. – Wikipedia

1.

We took the ox from Egypt—
stout hieroglyph, meat of its own meaning —
and yoked it to the tongue's plow. We ex-

tracted eye and horn,
stood the beast on its head.
Now its just a steer plodding

muscle's memory through the ABCs.
We furrow our little forties, cultivate code
in emblem's loam. As stewardship of the soil pre-

sumes possession, so we farm objects
with implements of sound, appropriate them,
lay away their fruit in our lexical silos. It rots.

Experience becomes the glottal, sibilant,
fricative constituents we assign it.
Not to mention labial.

2.

A little boy is driven
to engage his world,
to meet it 1/2

way w/ symbol
& so multiply
himself x it.

Every advent-
ure, fact, novelty
he furiously records
on green construction paper.

He devises means
to represent, no, to trans-
port every thing

wordless/immediate
until his planar paper burps bulges.

He dons goggles, bike helmet
as if to be conscious is to
crash into stuff. Would Blake

be begoggled, too? Carry back-
pack? (Inside: plenty of water, folder
of green construction paper, glue, scissors,
the divine). O!

ver time discovers what Blake
never did: he's a dork.

3.

So.

Jettisons the gog-
gles, helmet.
Learns to
read.
A
BCDEF

Gee, we're proud as he plods through Seuss.
He will eat God in a box. He will eat God without ox.

Kerri French

“I Dreamed I Called Him— No, Wait, I Did”

This morning, poems were born from my dying cat's head. A man in green named each one as he pulled them from the skull, his hands filled with the cursive letters I meticulously practiced one month in the third grade. From my kitchen to the street, the sun smelled of sweet tea, crushed insects whose legs I couldn't keep apart. I rode an elevator wearing nearly nothing. It was noon or maybe later, the heat so tense my shoes clung to the sidewalk like tiny claws to fabric or skin. Four stories up, my cat gave a few stiff moans before placing his head beneath the water bowl. I walked for hours but never arrived, the dust of newspapers rising like balloons crawling in and out of my left ear. Hunger stretched to the sky. My fingers stretched from hunger. Finally, my horoscope read: if home can be a coast, an ocean, you're already drowned. Inside, the man rose like a television character I once saw grinning in the road. *Let's call this one Heartbreak. I'll like it best, he said, because it's most like you.*

Manifest

Language is a ship with a bulging hold.

Maybe I am thinking of jungle, of sweating and thrusting then scrubbing with strong soap. Maybe I dream of ripe mangos bending boughs, of loincloths and bare breasts, of eating with my hands.

While you are thinking of plaids and hunting rifles and smoked cheeses, of one-room shops that smell of cedar, of fondling homespun wool, then sinking your fingers into it.

Maybe she is thinking of romantically strange. Audrey Hepburn in Roman Holiday—the princess explores Italy with Gregory Peck as her guide. Crisp cotton skirt, pale and breezy, clutching the broad chest of a man whose name she just learned, balancing on the back of a Vespa. Danger but not too danger.

And he may be searching for serenity on the shelves of Pier One, caressing the fringe of a Sari Accent Lamp, gauging the dimensions of a Shogun Entertainment Center. He mines for minimalism by maxing out his MasterCard.

While they may dream of brownstones, bay windows, cobblestone roads and wrought iron gates. They snap photos of each other at the graves of revolutionaries they have read about in textbooks. And of course they want to see where the tea was dumped.

Maybe I am thinking of takeout in small, white boxes, of throwaway chopsticks. Maybe I read fortune cookie messages aloud and laugh at the spelling errors with friends. A sweet and sorrow entrée.

Maybe you squint and try to smile when asking, "And where are you from?" in a slow, loud voice. And when he answers in an accent matching yours, maybe you begin to think of moving. Or perhaps you consider ways of boasting about this acquaintance to friends.

The cargo is dense and tangled—a manifold manifest.

E (It's a thing of got to have, a thing of must have no matter what, a thing to be coveted, to spend extra on, to search for a label confirming the origin of. This word is a slap across her face in an alley late at night. It's punching

him in the gut to make him yield, then taking what you paid for. This word you may gather strength from using.)

X (It's a bending and twisting of proportion and scale. It's *The Mikado* draped in silk and accented with women's feet crammed into wooden sandals. It's Al Jolson's celebrity for shucking and jiving while covered in soot. It's the muse that inspired the adventures of Sambo, Mumbo and Jumbo. This word is a refusal to call them by their true names.)

O (It's a reflection of the speaker's interior, just as negatives define the opposite side of a photograph, just as Gauguin's nudes of Tahitian women with flowers in their hair are actually paintings of his eyes. This word is ground giving shape to figure.)

T (It's what lured many onto big ships with promises of Shiny Things and Soft Things and Good Things to Eat. It's why the conquered were forced to pose with bow and arrow during World Fairs in cold continents of upside down hemispheres. This word encompasses by demagnetizing compasses.)

I (It's why lines were long and admission fees were charged, why audiences were barbaric who had come to witness barbarism. It's why Ota Benga was taken from the Congo, why he shared a cage with an orangutan at the Bronx Zoo. It's why this man fired a bullet into his own heart ten years later. This word requires that specimens be collected and catalogues formed.)

C (It's the ceramic cookie jar tagged "memorabilia" in your local thrift store. It's the swollen red melon lips. It's the gaping white eyes. It's the shadow deep as moonless midnight cast across her skin. This word is her body split open at the waist. This word consumes her sweet and doughy insides. This is not antique. This is new. This is now. Language goes on killing in its small and secret ways.)

The sails are up, but the riggings have come loose. There is no compass at the helm.

F

Joseph Capista

Black Raspberries

Was it nearly a year ago
I picked, greedily,
every thicket berry,
my fingers flicking
slack-jawed
daddy-long-legs
from the juiciest clusters,
then dropped those bursting
tongues in a sack
and brought them to you
who also took
them for blackberries
and baked them in a pie
we ate and puckered over,
sour mouths bent
from too little sugar
and when, love, will we
learn to meet with such
soft, forgiving lips
each tender mistake?

Curtis Bauer

Beginning With A Eucalyptus Leaf

for Elaine Sexton

A friend has sent me Greece by post.
She began with a leaf

slender like her fingers,
the green aged & lined

but still pungent with the odor of sun
dried terraces beside the sea.

Next she sent a pebble,
one peeled from the wall of her room,

a wall that holds up the sky
blue & deep like ocean above her.

She carried it with her to the beach,
washed it in salt water, then sucked

the salt from it as she shuffled through sand
to the terrace where she dropped it in wine

so opaque anyone else may have mistook it for night.
Weeks without a letter & today a thin envelope waits

beneath the mailbox. Her hand has scrawled
this note in place of the return address:

*Open this letter in a hushed room immediately
after you remember you still haven't opened it.*

My friend is cryptic but I understand her.
The envelope was filled with the sound

of the night in Naxos—a stirring in
the distance that could have been a late traveler,

or a crab pulling itself onto a rock,
a star filled sky dropping over the horizon.

The last letter never arrived. The postman
said it was too big to deliver & gave me

a wrinkled yellow receipt that smells of rosemary
& scratches my hands when I touch it.

My skin tans when I hold it. I keep it
in my desk & open the drawer when I need heat.

Omaha, Nebraska

It's math, almost. People say my brother is in Omaha, Nebraska, and so the twenty-eight dollars and thirty-four cents, and the ticket, and the fat blue submarine of a Greyhound bus, and a seat, and these people.

One has her things in a red bag she slept on while she waited for the bus to come to the station, and now she's sleeping on it again. And then a man with a baby, a very *young* baby, and it's on his lap, and where is the mother? As far as I know she's not anywhere. And another man who is old and who looks for a long time at things, whose babies, if he had any, are men already. Men! And there's more and there's others and there's me. I look like all of them. All of them at once. The old man and the girl and the young man and the baby, the *very young* baby, and the red bag. That's me. Thank you very much.

It's just after we've pulled out of the station, and I'm talking to a guy next to me who's looking out the window and who's none of the people I mentioned before. I've got my hands tucked into my armpits because it's February and because it's Chicago and because it's night.

"Can you believe it?" I say to him.

"What?"

"Look at these people."

"I'm looking at these people," he says.

"Look at all these *people*." I don't lift my hands from under my arms; instead I point at them with my forehead.

The guy looks around and then turns back toward the window.

I say, "Think about all the people in this bus that are going to die before we do. And that's just *these* people. Now think about all the people in the *world* that are going to die before you and me."

The guy's mouth is open and he's leaving his breath all over the window. He says, "Yeah, I said that. I said *I'm looking at these people*," and he scratches his neck just above the collar of his winter coat. Then he presses his face against the window.

"Yeah," I say, "think about it. Someday these people are going to be gone somewhere else, and we'll still be here, you and I, just wandering around looking at trees and getting jobs. And these people and all those other people that we never saw, those people that we never met, those people will be gone, and we'll walk around like they were never there in the first place. They won't even cease to be. They will never even have *been*."

"For you and I," the guy says.

"Right."

"What about the people who don't die before us?"

“Good for them,” I say.

Past the open mouth and white breath of the man with his face against the window, out there in the fast-moving dark, I see that it’s snowing. The blue Greyhound wanders through it and swims heavy and dense down the highway past towns I know. Towns I’ve *been to*. Towns with names like Elva and Waterman and Shabbona. What can words like that possibly be good for if they don’t belong to towns? If there aren’t streets and sidewalks and trees and a piece of grass in the middle that say, *Here, this is a place, and this is its name?* They are words I’d not miss if I’d never heard them, but I already had. I’d already seen the piece of grass in the middle and the streets and trees and all of that.

I met a man in one of those towns who told me about a war he’d been in; I never learned which. He talked quietly but there was a loudness about the way he moved his hands. Sometimes, he told me, the air was so filled with noise, the guns, and the movement, and the panic, and the winds, and the war, the war in *everything*, that he couldn’t move, that there just wasn’t any room left in that air for him. “At that moment,” he said, “I forgot that I was alive.” He looked at me then and pressed both of his palms against the countertop in front of him until the tops of his fingers went white. “That rock I was leaning up against,” he said, “we were equal, the same thing. Nothing.”

That’s when he got shot, and he said—as the bullet pushed itself through the muscle of his left thigh and made a home next to the bone—that he realized he was alive very quickly. “That’s very lucky,” I said.

We pass through all the towns I know, and then I see signs for some I’ve only heard of. Then it’s nothing but strange names that mean nothing, and after that the snow comes down so thick and white that everything in the world but the inside of the bus disappears. All that’s left is blue fabric and dark windows and people who don’t know my name. And everything else is gone, and we’re all in the bus, and it’s not so bad because we are warm and because we have forgotten anything else ever existed anyway, and the bus is enough because it’s all there is.

THE GIRL WITH THE RED BAG is awake now. She’s sitting across the aisle from me, and I need something from her. She’s not pretty. Or she’s almost pretty, but that’s not what I need. I need to see what’s in her red bag. It’s not filled with clothes; I can tell. It’s got things inside. Hard things with edges and corners. It must have been awful to sleep on.

She’s got a book, but I’ve never heard of it. It looks okay, and so I get up and sit down next to her. The red bag’s on her lap.

“You know,” I say, “I’ve read a lot of books.”

She looks at me, and I don’t think she is happy about me being next to her. It’s not in her eyes; a lot of people say you can tell it in the eyes. *It’s in*

the eyes, it's there, it's there. But I'm not good at looking at people's eyes. This girl with the red bag has got it in the sides of her mouth.

Then I say, "How is that one? Maybe I've read it."

"It's good, thank you," she says. "The book."

But I don't care about the book, and I haven't read it, and she's not happy with me, and I realize she's not reading it anyway. She's got a piece of paper tucked into it. She's sketching something.

I say, "You're not even reading it," and I try to look at what she's sketching. She closes the book and tucks it under her thigh.

"Well," she says, "I've already read it, and I know it's good. I don't have to be reading it right now to know that."

"Yes," I say. "You were drawing."

She says yes and I say yes again and somewhere in front of us the baby with no mother begins to cry.

"What was it?"

"You know," she says, "I'm not really happy about you sitting next to me."

I say, "I already knew that."

"You did?"

I want to grab the bag from her and open it up. I need to see *those things*. But then the bus driver stands and turns around and I realize that the bus has stopped. He tells us that this is Iowa City, and that Iowa City is in the state of Iowa. That it's been snowing here for days. That we have to stop. That we'll wait, and then we'll see. We can go into the station if we'd like. It's the very early hours of the morning, but there's something in there to drink that is warm.

Nobody says anything; the man with his face against the window is asleep. I don't think anyone is going to move because the bus station does not look like a happy place to be. It's empty with bright lights that make everything inside look fake. Then the baby starts to cry again. And then it's bawling, and the bus is full of that noise. And you would not believe it. I swear. It's got everyone pressing themselves into their seats. The girl with the red bag has her hands on her ears. The man with the baby doesn't know what to do. He looks at the baby, then at the people on the bus. He shakes his head and closes his eyes. I think these people want him to get out and go into the station. They've all got their eyes screwed up trying to stop the noise from getting inside of them, but it doesn't help.

"Aw Christ," the man says. "Fucking hell." And he gets up with his baby and goes into the station.

THIS BUS IS NOT GOING to take me to Omaha today, and because it has stopped, I see that the world has reappeared from behind the white curtain that took it away. And so I get up to leave the bus and say thank you to the girl with the

red bag, but I wish I hadn't because I never got to look inside. The man with the baby is gone, and the man with his face on the window is still sleeping, and the old man has his eyes closed but is folding and rubbing his hands and I can tell he's awake. I leave all these people and smile as I do because I know that they'll disappear someday, and maybe they know I'll disappear too.

The bus driver stands outside looking up at the snow like he's trying to figure it out. Like maybe if he looks hard enough, he'll see a way to stop it. He's smoking a cigarette.

"Do you think it snows in Paris?" he asks me.

I say, "I hope so," and then I walk down the street.

After I walk a little ways past the station, I turn back and see he's watching me. I can't tell if it's his breath or smoke, but I see a white cloud above him grow and swell and dance then disappear in the air and the snow. He waves to me, and I turn and keep walking.

I've got my hands in my armpits because it's February and because it's Iowa City and because it's early morning. The snow has covered everything. Only it's not white. Under the light on the streets, it's grey. Across the street from me, people run and hold the hoods of their jackets across their faces and fall and get back up and run again. They are drunk, and they are happy, and I'm happy for them, and I think that if their legs were not kicking against the surface of the world that it might not spin at all, and everyone would stop and look at each other and wonder what went wrong.

The snow is winning. It's deep and complete, and nothing is getting away this time. Cars are not cars; they are grey outlines of things that used to be cars, and they have not moved because there are no marks, and they *will not* move because the snow has finally gotten it right.

I'm on the sidewalk or I'm on the street. They are the same thing now. The whole world is soft and grey and my feet push it down and down and down and down and I just walk over the top of it. When the whole world is covered up like that you start to think there might be treasures somewhere hidden beneath. Something that someone might like to find. Something that I will never have thought of, but when I find it, I will realize that I've been looking for it for a very long time. I don't know what, but I do want to find something like that.

I walk down the street past a late night gas station and over the train tracks until I see a window in an old stone building that is full of light. Next to the window is a door. When I pull it open, warm noise escapes, surrounds me, and then vanishes behind me in the snow. Just inside the door is a step-ladder and a lady with a rag tied around her head standing on top holding a paint roller, ready to cover the white walls in grey.

She stops and looks down at me.

"What is this place?" I say.

"That depends on who you ask," she says. "It used to be called Mike's,"

but now," she presses her roller up and down against the walls and more white disappears, "now it's called Club Car."

"Club Car?"

She points to the far wall of the place, which is only about twenty feet away from the entrance. On the wall, in sloppy metal work, is the outline of a train. "Club Car," she says.

Sitting at the bar is an ugly lady who looks old but is probably young. Her hair is cut short. I take a seat next to her. Before I look up at the bartender, and before I get a hand on the bar, and before I think what might happen next, I realize something smooth and warm is pressing against the skin just under my left eye. And it's a gun. The bartender who is a lady is holding a shotgun, and she's pressing it against a spot in my face I never hoped a gun would be pressed. I think about doors left open, and then about nothing.

"Oh. Yes. Ha!" The ugly woman is talking. "Karen, you are something. Something! Oh, yes. You would do that, I suppose. Ha!"

"You know," the bartender says to me, "you've got lips like some kind of movie star."

The ugly woman laughs at that one.

I close my eyes.

When I open them back up, I see that the gun and the bartender are gone and there is a glass filled with dark liquid in front of me and I drink it. It tastes like burning trees.

The bar is filled with bright light. It illuminates everything. The cracks and the breaks and the holes in the floor and the walls and the ceiling and the sad and tired faces of the people that have left a warm place somewhere else for this warm place. There are only a few, the ugly woman next to me at the bar, and a man and woman in a booth past her; and I guess the woman who was on the ladder painting; but she's off somewhere else and the ladder is still there. The man and woman in the booth are just as ugly as the woman at the bar. In the light, their faces are filled with missing pieces some places and extra pieces in others. But in those folds where sadness should be I see something else. Something soft.

The ugly woman talks to me, and we drink.

"Ha!" she says. "She wouldn't ever! Don't you worry about her. She's just. She doesn't know what to do with anything anymore."

"Hey," the bartender says to the ugly woman, but she is smiling, and then she is laughing, and then, "Oh!"

"That's a good jacket. A nice one," the ugly woman says. "What are you doing here?"

"I was on a bus," I say.

"A bus! Where does a kid in a jacket like that have to go? Ha! A bus!" She looks at the bartender and then back at me.

"I'm going to Omaha. To Nebraska."

"That's exactly what you look like you're doing. Exactly that, I'd say."

Then she drinks and I drink and she is telling me a story about a man she once knew who once was her husband.

"Have you ever been shot before?" she says.

"Me?"

Then she says, "I never have. Nope. Never. I never have. But I once had a husband who was shot. Right in the head. Or the mouth. Right in the mouth."

"He was shot?"

"In the mouth," she says. "Right in the mouth. He died, you know. He was shot in the mouth but it went right on through his head. Doesn't matter where it goes in if that's where it's going anyways."

I say, "Who shot him?"

"Ha! Who!" She starts to laugh but doesn't finish. And then she says—with nothing like a laugh inside her, "He shot himself."

She looks down for a long time, and before she looks back up, the people in the booth stand and start to leave. As they walk out the door the man, with folds and creases up and down his face, nods his head and smiles at me.

"You know," I say, "I bet at that moment. Right when he pulled the trigger and felt that bullet bite through him, that he loved you more than he ever had before."

I drink and the ugly woman puts her hands on the bar. She closes her eyes and opens her mouth. I wait for her to speak, but she never does.

WHEN I GET BACK TO THE BUS, the driver is still standing outside looking up at the sky. Inside the bus, I see the man with the baby. The baby is asleep, and the man holding it is asleep, and the old man with men for babies is asleep. The girl with the red bag looks out the window for a long time at something I can't see. The sun has come up and it's stopped snowing.

I sit down and the bus begins to move. It takes me and all these sleeping people away from the snow and toward something none of us have ever heard of. I watch out the window as the city disappears and is forgotten until nothing outside exists but fields of white reaching on and on toward the edges of everything. The world has falls and turns and scars and folds and seas and things, but it is sometimes a very simple place. I am glad for that. **F**

The Deer

He was a hunter and the father of a six-year-old boy. On the day before Christmas one year he fell a perfect eight-point buck. His friends slapped him on the shoulder and unsheathed their hunting blades, but he said he only needed help getting the deer back to his truck. It was cold, he told them. The animal would keep outside a couple days.

He planned to bring the deer home and let his son see it. Let him see the human eyes, the black mouth, the blood from the wound dried in the fur. He would watch his son marvel at the size of the antlers as he ran his small hands over them. They would feel like worn wood. Driving home, he imagined the day when his son would be old enough to fire a rifle. He would stand behind him and place an arm on the boy's shoulder, bracing him against the kick.

At home he found his son in the living room, playing with a coloring book. He sat down and watched the boy turn through the pages. It was a book of Christmas scenes, and the boy carefully narrated each one: Santa Claus in his toy factory, the sled pulled by reindeer. They can fly, his son said.

Out in the garage he took a hacksaw and cut off a section of the deer's hind leg at the first joint above the hoof. He did the same with one of the front legs, then set the limbs in a sink to let the blood run out of them. Later, he set a ladder against the house and climbed to the roof.

In the morning he brought the boy outside, sent him up the ladder, and followed one rung behind. When they reached the top he put his hand on the boy's shoulder to steady him. He could feel his son breathe in suddenly when he saw the tracks, the proof of magic. **F**

Stopover

The perky scarf comes off, the airline pin,
the royal blue you used to think
would change you,

Ann from Delaware,
lost among hotel room pastels,
imaginary woodlands.

At the foot of the bed, the prim tote
you drag past news and food
in Hartford, Duluth, Tulsa...
all those towns where people live.

The others down in the piano bar
— you wanted to be alone tonight
with your fantasy captain,

he of the level gaze and Viking's build,
dead last year in an Arctic fireball.
Tonight you're his dream stewardess,

dispensing orchid scents
as you glide up and down the cabin,
permanent personal air machine
fanning your hair.

Flush with the glamour
of networks, glow-in-the-dark routes
that curve over poles and oceans.

Serene, like the ladies
nailed to the fronts of ships
in olden times.

Simpatico

Flower, I am nectar.

Gold,

I am the blue light in your hair, your skin, your burnished eyes.

Despite some wax inside your well—a love that sighed and left its cry
inside your heart, I light you. I touch me like you touch me,
two rowers on the sea—you are

pure love inside a cracker shell, like fingers reaching up a well
as I do dare to dangle mine.

It's hard to say who's scaring whom and who has done the saving.

But as I suckle you your blood, these stories of my life,
air pockets of desire flow forth—their vagueness just my longing,

their vagueness just my dirty mind on hunt for someone sick like me,
or tough like me or open

like an empty hole where rabbits jolt and peek their heads from
week to week—so hot at times you cannot speak—

Five Stars for Your Maker

The trouble started when my wife lost her eye.

It was a freak accident, really. Some boys down the road built a cannon out of a piece of pipe and old gasoline. It must have taken them a hundred tries, all June and July, but they finally got the thing to explode. And since they didn't have anything else, they loaded it with marbles. It must have been a real sight—smoke rippling across the ground as the thing blew, and all those marbles staked suddenly to the sky. I bet they were as surprised as anybody to see the world awash in circles, the day above them transformed into a streaming mash of constellation points.

My wife happened to be outside hanging up my uniform pants on the clothesline with our daughter, Little Sam, who watched the whole thing from beneath the shade of our one big oak. She said that there was a *bang*, a whistle, and then marbles raining down like an exploding cartoon. And one marble—a pink and green one with specks of white—landed smack in my wife's eye and put it out clean as the laundry she had slung over that line.

After that, she went into an understandable funk. Doctor Doug told her that she was lucky it didn't reach her brain, that she should thank God for the damage that was done. She didn't take kindly to that. After work I'd hear her sobbing in the bedroom, moaning and talking to herself. Little Sam would be curled up in her room with a pillow over her head. Not crying really, just waiting. Waiting for me to come home, I guess, and make everything go back to normal.

The first week after the accident we did a lot of holding and crying. My wife looked kind of cute with an oversized bandage wrapped around her head, and the three of us would sit in our big bed and hug and comfort each other.

"I love you mommy," Little Sam would say. "Even with the band aid."

"I love you too," I'd say. "You're still beautiful."

She smiled at us but didn't answer. Instead she patted Sam on the head and held my arm in a death grip, like she was going to take it with her wherever she went.

I took time off from work at the missile factory and made her breakfast in bed but she didn't eat much. She didn't say so but I knew I was better at assembling nose-cones than making French Toast. I let Sam stay home too, and together we peppered her with attention.

"Are you dizzy?" I asked. "Nauseous? Feeling poor?"

"Mommy—can I rub your feet?" Sam said. "Can I draw you a picture?"

She still smiled at us, but it was a different kind of smile. It looked like it took all of her strength to raise the corners of her mouth.

"Thanks guys," she said finally. "But I'd rather just be left alone for a bit."

Then the doctor suggested that we pick out a patch for her to wear, so the three of us went to the costume shop to take a look around. My wife was apprehensive. She hadn't been out in public for a while so she wedged herself against my shoulder and held Little Sam high in her arms even though she was just about too big for carrying. The patches were all lined up in a display case next to the fake jewelry.

"Hmm," my wife said. "I don't know about this. They look so frilly."

"You can't wear gauze forever," I said. "How 'bout this one?" I held it up: it was red with white trim—a pretty thing really. The sort of material they might make dresses with.

"It looks like lingerie," she said. "I can't wear that on my face."

"Maybe a combination then?" I grabbed another one and tried to hold it up to her cheek.

"This one's pretty," said Little Sam.

"This isn't right," she whispered to me. "Any of it."

"Mom, if you buy a patch, can I get a cowgirl hat?" said Little Sam.

"This is all wrong," she said. Then she was in retreat, shaking her head a little. I went to reach for her but she pulled back.

"No," she said. "Just no." Then she was out the door.

I grabbed Sam and bought her that hat on credit, quick as I could.

I bought a patch anyway, a plain black one, like a pirate would wear, but that didn't prove to be a super idea. She was pissed at the patch, as if it had poked her eye out in the first place.

"Sam loves her mommy with or without a patch," she said. "Right darling?" She twirled it around her finger as if she were about to do a trick. Little Sam was busy nodding I worried her neck might break.

"What do you think, honey," she asked me. "Am I so hideous that I need a patch?"

"We just want you to be happy," I said.

"Yeah, mom," said Sam. "Happy."

"My babies," she said. "My darling babies."

I thought things were on the up and up after that.

She ditched the patch and the gauze and started going out in public with her empty socket, which I really didn't mind. It doesn't look like much, just the same skin you'd expect to see, eyebrows, the flap of an eyelid. Just no eye. Instead there was a pink cocoon, a mixture of membrane and nothingness. The first week went fine. But after that, the complaints started to trickle in. I couldn't go for milk without someone tapping me on the shoulder. At work the guys asked me if everything was OK at home. The mayor called, the sheriff stopped me on the side of the road for a chat. Even the deacon cornered me in the hardware store and told me enough was enough. My wife

was a meager woman. But she seemed to be able to give everyone a case of the creeps when it came to her eye. She stared a lot, people said. And she followed them around until they looked her in the face. I ignored it until Little Sam came home from school one day bawling.

"Tommy Watson said mommy is a freak," she told me. "That she chases people around because her brains oozed out of her head."

"It's OK," I said. "He doesn't know anything about anything."

"I just want everything to go back to normal," she said. "I miss mommy."

I held on to her like a wind was blowing through us. Half of me wanted five minutes with Tommy Watson's brain, but I knew it wouldn't help.

After that things went seriously downhill. I tried to get her to wear the patch, but she cried every time she saw it in my hands. Instead, she decided to stay home and not go out at all. She watched a lot of TV, which was very unlike her. One day I caught her in front of Ripley's *Believe It.Or Not* with the volume turned up as far as it would go.

"Hey honey," I sort of shouted. "What's the deal?"

She didn't answer. On the screen they were running a special on a freak circus: a bearded lady, an elephant man, a midget with size twenty feet. The narrator was talking about how they all traveled the country and did tricks with trampolines and knives and things like that. The whole thing made me nervous. I put my hand on her shoulder but she shrugged me away. She didn't even turn around, she just dodged me. I went to Little Sam's room and climbed in bed with her.

"How long has she been watching that?" I asked.

"Hours," she said. "For hours." Her face was a white cotton sheet.

"I'll think of something," I said.

She looked at me but didn't say anything at all.

One day when I came home from work, my wife came running out to meet me in the driveway. At first I thought something had happened. But when I saw her hug grin, I got a real bad feeling. She looked a bit hysterical.

I must have made one heck of a face because she stopped dead in her tracks.

"Welcome home, honey," she said. Her voice quivered and she gave me a little fake wave. I gasped: she had gone and shoved that marble into where her eye used to be. After the accident, I put the marble in my underwear drawer, where she must have found it.

I couldn't speak. I wanted to, but I couldn't—my mouth would not open. *Is it stuck? Can you get it out?* Everything seemed inappropriate.

"This belongs to me," she said. "An eye for an eye."

I didn't answer.

The next day I took Little Sam back by the costume shop. I thought maybe we could find something there that might do the trick.

"Pick out anything you want," I told her. "I'm gonna look for something for mommy."

"But I don't want anything," she said. "Just her."

I picked her up. "I know sweetie, I know," I said.

Back in school, I figured out early that I would never be a doctor or a lawyer. It was the missile factory for me; every new test or take home assignment confirmed it. My teachers didn't try to push me—they let me work away at my own pace, doing my own things. But they said I brightened up the corners of the classroom, that my good nature would be more than enough to succeed with in the world. I mainly goofed around, but it seemed to be the one thing I had to offer, my special skill. I truly loved making people laugh.

So the following day I came home from work dressed like a Civil War General. When I walked in the door and saw my wife I called her 'ma'am' and strutted around saying: 'howdy, hey. Howdy, hey.'

She cracked a smile for a moment and walked away like I wasn't there. The flannel itched so I went to show Sam.

"I got mommy to smile," I said. "Like the outfit?"

"Are you and old fox in a gray tuxedo," she said, rubbing the fake brass buttons on the coat and stroking my stick-on whiskers.

"Well," I said "I guess I am."

The next day I showed up in an astronaut suit. It wasn't a real one of course. Just something made from aluminum that the shop sold me on my way home from work. The helmet had a clear visor in front and I mouthed a bunch of words like I was talking to her, but she couldn't hear. Then I flipped the visor and talked normal. She liked that. "Hi honey. I sure am hungry. I've been to the moon and back." The smile lasted longer than the first one. But I still had to make my own dinner.

A few days later I brought her a costume. I stood there in a corduroy sheet that the clerk had assured me was the proper attire of an apostle. I held out a neatly folded pink and green dress with glitter spattered all over it.

"What is it?" She looked at the tight bundle of fabric, picking at the sequins with her fingers.

"Haven't you ever heard of Cinderella?" I said. "Go ahead. Put it on."

She wouldn't. She glanced at my get-up and shook her head.

"Why don't you put it on," she said. But when she turned away, the upward curve of her lips was undeniable, and I think her hips even bounced as she moved down the hall.

I thought I was on to something. For two weeks straight I came home in a different outfit. Cowboys, bikers, hippies, park rangers, mailmen. I must have been everyone in the world for a day. And each time I'd bring her something to wear as well. Indian headdresses, fake fur coats, tiaras by the dozens, jeans with patches sown all over them. I'd stay true to character and

hold the clothes in front of her like I selling them at the market.

"Special delivery," I'd say, standing upright in my postal attire like a happy twelve-year-old.

"Found this with state's evidence," I'd mention as I adjusted my polarized sunglasses, a plastic replica of a state trooper's badge pinned to my button-down shirt. "Thought it might suit you, miss."

But then one day she put her hand on my shoulder and told me to stop. I remember it well because I was dressed like a mechanic and I didn't want her to notice that I'd reused the park ranger shirt. An adjustable wrench sat snug on my hip and there was grease under my finger nails. I had this thing down.

"Sam," she said to me. "I can't take it anymore."

I expected her to tell me that it wasn't working, that all this pretending was tasteless, a mockery of her situation. I thought maybe she'd become offended when I wore the pirate outfit and accidentally dropped the plastic parrot in the toilet while shaving. Instead she ran outside and fell down beneath the big oak. She hadn't been in the backyard since the accident so I let her stay by herself for a while before I went to her. I wanted to give her time to cry.

When I did make my way through the tall grass and sit next to her, I realized she wasn't crying at all.

"Sam," she said. "You've got to stop. This is maddening."

I opened my mouth but she pressed a finger to my lips. Her tone was all business and it gave me the shivers.

"You come home all dressed up in these costumes and I want to play along. I really do. I know you're just trying to cheer me up." She was staring at the sky then, sucking on her cheek in concentration.

"But I don't think I'm well, Sam." She paused and picked my wrench up from where it had fallen out of the belt loop. "I don't fit anymore."

"Honey," I said. "That's natural. Doctor Doug told us that you'd internalize things, that"

"Internalize," she said. "Internalize? Do you know what I've been thinking lately? Do you have any idea what thoughts have been running through my head all week?"

"I've been having crazy thoughts, Sam," she said. "Crazy ones. I feel like I've been arguing with God." She worked away at the wrench, squeezing it until her knuckles went white beneath the skin. "Lately I ask him things. You know?"

I nodded. I did know. I'd been trying the same strategy.

"The thing is," she said. "I think he's been arguing back. I stare out the window at night and I can't understand why I'm trapped in this body, why I've been cast as..." She paused for a moment, considering. "Cast as this. Cast as me." Her hand fluttered in front of her face. I lowered my head a little.

"So I asked him," she said. "And you know what he said?"

I shook my head.

“He told me that you make yourself.”

“Honey,” I said.

“He told me that you make yourself, Sam. That it’s up to me. That I can be whatever I want,” she said. “But when I thought about it, the only thing I could imagine was the moon.”

I started to say something just to get some words out. But I didn’t, because for a second I swear she was glowing-like a moon. Her features were pale but radiant and rocked back and forth like a spring wound too tight.

“Most of the time you look up at the sky at night and say swell or great, and you get a feeling tucked up in your chest that you don’t know what to do with. Well I figured it out.”

I put my hand on her knee but she didn’t move or look at me. Her skin was hard like the peel of an orange, and cold too.

“Sam, I wanted to *be* the moon. I know it sounds ridiculous, but I wanted to look down over everything and be absolutely perfect, to know that people were looking back at me and making wishes. I even imagined the view from up there, how I could illuminate the stream and rivers at night, how I could see over the rows of houses.”

She stared up over the oak tree for a while as the sky began to darken at the edges. I fought the urge to touch her, to grab her and squeeze sense back into her somehow.

“Maybe I’m sick, Sam. Sick of this unfair world and the way things can just change.” It looked like she was examining me, measuring my capacity for what she was going to say.

“I don’t know what to do about it Everything’s a bad dream. There’s only waking up and staying the same. That’s not enough.”

“What do we do?” I said.

“You make yourself, Sam.” She sighed and brushed her fingers across my forehead. “Five stars for your maker. I guess it’s not such a bad gig.”

THE NEXT DAY WHEN I CAME HOME I felt naked in my work clothes. Little Sam and I gathered all the costumes and hung them in the hall closet behind the rain slickers and winter clothes, making sure to keep them out of sight. The house was quiet for a few days. My wife didn’t talk at all—instead she wrote Post-It notes. She wandered around sticking them in weird places, but they didn’t make any sense. Each one had one word scribbled down—a verb, with an exclamation point. Sam and I collected them at first, hoping to find a message. But there’s not much you can do with a bunch of verbs. So we took to throwing them away like junk mail.

It was early one Tuesday and I had just finished the dishes. Sam had a book propped up in her face and classical music played softly over the radio. Everything felt peaceful and exact. The quiet had soaked into our lives by

then. So when my wife steeped out of the shadows and made a noise, I nearly dropped the glass that I had been so carefully drying.

"Jesus," I said. She advanced, holding her hands over her head, and floated over the living room carpet like a drunk ghost.

"Whooooo," she was saying. "Woooooo" Over and over, a little louder each time.

"Why are you doing this," I said. She kept wailing so I shook her and kept on yelling.

"I love you, Karen" I said. "I love you and I know who you are." Then I slapped her.

She focused that eye on me with so much hate that I let go and stepped back. I took a big step back, like I was in over my head in a fight. She came to so suddenly that I flashed to *The Exorcist*, half imagining that her head might rotate around and around like a pinwheel.

"You," she said. "You don't know anything."

She took a deep breath and began shaking her head. I braced myself for an explosion that never came. In fact she looked eerily composed, like a priest conveying a piece of bad news.

"Karen?"

"No way," she said. Then she turned and walked out the door.

When she didn't come back after an hour, I left Sam with the neighbor and drove around looking for her. I found her walking down a dirt road in the middle of nowhere. The sky was as clear as an empty glass and it must have been thirty degrees. She fought like a wild animal but I got her into the truck. As I drove, she stared out over the fields and pressed her cheek to the cold window, and I knew that I had done something, pricked some bubble. She radiated anger and even her breaths were sharp and hard, each exhale as violent as the snapping of a bird's neck. The woman next to me was no one I knew.

NOW INSTEAD OF TRYING TO BE THE MOON, she hitch hikes across the state and sleeps at truck stops and in corn fields. Maybe she's on a spiritual quest, though I couldn't begin to imagine what kind. After a while she'll call and I'll pick her up from some strange place or another. I'll get a postcard or a note full of sloppy, misspelled words, a smear of lipstick near the bottom where she scrawls her name. Weeks go by but I know eventually the phone will ring. It's not much, I know. But it's just enough.

"Hi honey," I say. "How's business?"

"Cut the crap, Sam," she says. "I just got pitched out of a semi while it was still moving. Stupid jerk didn't have a sense of humor."

"Ok," I say. "Let me put on some pants."

"Don't wake the kid," she says. "Just lock the door and let her sleep. It's not like the house is gonna burn down."

She's right. I already rebuilt once and made her promise to stop lighting candles.

"Come and get me," she says. "I'm out on highway 70 by the Mexican billboard."

And I always do.

Sam doesn't know what to think, but then neither do I. "Have you tried counting sheep," I say, on nights she can't sleep. "Or wishing on every animal in the world?" We walk through the empty rooms past closet crammed with costumes that I doubt I'll ever wear again. The backyard is our spot and it feels better there, even in the middle of the night. We bundle up and sit real still and I tell her how I want her to remember her mom. "She loved leotards," I say. "And jelly shoes. And she loved to have her back scratched." Then I'll whisper made up things until she giggles herself to sleep, and I watch the stars and wonder if there's anything behind them that concerns itself with us down here.

Or sometimes if we're feeling low, we go out back and plop down as if we're on a dinner picnic. We munch corn on the cob and sip soda and watch the sun dip from view. When we're good and full we wander in the twilight—taking great big breaths of air—and search for marbles. Even though it's been some time since the neighbor boys figured out that cannon, there are still plenty of marbles to be found and it feels good to remove them from our lives while we wait and see what might happen next. Their little round faces protrude from the hard earth, dusted with frost, or covered with old straw. Or they lie gleaming against fence posts, untouched in their private eternity; or they hide from us and keep the search on for another night. If we feel like it, we wrap ourselves with blankets and start a small fire. Sam dozes off while I watch the shadows for hints of light. There are so many more out there, hidden in places that are beyond even my dreams. But when the night is calm and my head is clear, I can see them winking, telling me that we are still here, two together and hopeful, perfect as the morning that waits for us, mere hours away. **F**

Tracy Truels

when the dogs come running

from the house search out
the safety of the olive tree
father is in the mountains
hiding behind craggy rocks
with a gun you play hide
and seek in the orange grove
sister laughs at you because
you are scared of the dogs

i am history the ripe softening
pears on your doorstep guns
are buried in the orange grove
father seeks safety inside
the house you are an olive tree
hanging onto the mountain
search out sister's laugh
to soften the rocks

i am history what lives of you
plays buried inside me
pears keep falling from the tree

Things We Never Divided Up But Probably Should Have

This is what I'll take: the bar down the street with the good cover band and cheap drafts, the unheated room and the cold bed, cats with the wrong names, ash on the table, your mother drunk in the kitchen, used tissues in your basket, chipped piano keys, the video store that never carried "The African Queen." You take your pregnant sister, the bad tattoo, all of the X-Files episodes, the ripped package of condoms, the blue stash box, the cigars you bought by mistake, the complete history of western thought, the broken green lighter I gave you for Christmas, the flood zone and the soy milk. I'll take the gingerbread house, the photos of us at dinner, the bloody towel, all the Ed Wood movies, the iced tea recipe, and this time you take your mother rolling on the floor. You can also have the drawings in the basement, the frozen burritos, the leather jacket, Frank Sinatra, Labor Day weekend, raspberries and all the piercings. We can share the last drink, the long drive, the downstairs and the pillow.

FAMILY DEBATES, 1976-1983

I. Whether cousin Bobby really “ate” a sparkler during our Bicentennial picnic.

Mom: Until I pulled it out of his mouth, yes. But, no, he didn't eat it.

Dad: Don't remember.

Sister: I remember him telling me he was going to do it, then hearing the rest from Uncle Oscar. Plus there's that picture of Bobby holding the sparkler, making a face like, *Mmm, delicious*. But the sparkler isn't even lit.

Uncle Oscar: All day he was telling me he was going to do it and then goddamned if he didn't just stick that thing right in. I was the one drove him to the emergency room. The doctors, or orderlies I guess, were dressed up like minutemen. Can you imagine that?

Grandpop: It was a pretzel, not a sparkler. He wouldn't stop running around with those sparklers, so I gave him a pretzel, you know, to keep him occupied. He made up the rest.

Cousin Bobby: I'll be spending Thanksgiving in Barbados, thanks.

II. Whether Dad faked a knee injury to avoid attending the Pope's visit to Philadelphia.

Dad: I've said it a thousand times: I had every intention of going with you, but tripped on one of those little wire fences, a wicket fence, I'd guess you call it, when we were all pushing through the crowd. I thought you saw it happen, but oh no, I've had to justify myself ever since. It's sad, when you think about it. Plus the knee still hurts sometimes when it rains.

Mom: Facts: a) There were no fences around. B) You'd complained all week about going, even saying, at one point, “What do I have to do, fake a knee injury?” C) You later admitted the whole thing in therapy.

Sister: This one has always seemed a pretty easy call to me.

Me: I'm just glad I got to ride back with him. We stopped at Dairy Queen and had a few Dilly Bars until “the coast was clear.”

III. Whose fault it was we wore matching *I-Survived-the-Soooperdooperlooper!* T-shirts to Grandmom and Grandpop's surprise 50th anniversary party.

Mom: I'm not talking about this again. I'm really not. But I will say this: did those T-shirts mean we don't care about Grandmom and Grandpop? Did those T-shirts ruin anyone's special memories or make the occasion any less special in any way?

Dad: It was your mother's fault.

Sister: Mom.

Me: Mom.

Grandmom: I was able to nail polish-out the words in the group photo.

IV. Whether Dad's allergies were really the reason we couldn't keep Patches.

Mom: There were a variety of reasons, I'd guess you'd say, but yes, your father's allergies certainly topped the list. We've always made that clear.

Dad: I'm just glad I can cross the yard now. You know, without getting humped.

Me: He never seemed all that happy, really. Maybe he didn't like his name. Patches. Plus he was missing that eye.

Mom: That's *why* we named him Patches. We all agreed how cute that was.

Dad: I wanted 'Clint Eastwood.' There's a dog name you don't hear every day.

Sister: I've never told you guys this before, but one time Patches tried to strangle me. It was right after we got back from Colonial Williamsburg. I thought he would have missed me, so I made up a little bed for him beside mine (Mom, this is also the true story behind the missing Christmas linens) but all Patches did was pee on it. I thought I'd clean things up, but Patches wouldn't get off the linens. I kept pulling at them, saying, "Patches, move! Bad doggie!" and the next thing I knew I was on my back and Patches was on top of me, sort of pinning my neck with the Christmas linens. He'd gotten them stuck between his paws, I guess.

Mom: Well, he's in a happier place now.

Patches: I know you're the ones who turned the squirrels against me.

V. What happened to the nativity set Uncle Randy made for us.

Mom: Ask your dad; he's the one who couldn't stop admiring it, remember? *Oh, let's put this under the tree right now. You've really outdone yourself this time, Randy.*

Dad: Well, if accepting gifts graciously is a crime, I'm guilty. Throw away the key.

Sister: They were made out of beer bottles, right?

Me: Beer bottles and bottle-caps. He'd glued them together into little people.

Dad: Those weren't people; they were Jesus and Mary and Joseph.

Mom: Mary was St. Pauli Girl.

Dad: And Jesus was Budweiser—the King of Beers. It really was very creative, if you would have just given it the chance.

Sister: The wise men smelled like cigars.

Dad: Their crowns were cigar rings.

Sister: And their hands were made out of those fuzzy little wires.

Me: Pipe cleaners.

Mom: Those poked through the garbage bag.

VI. Was it a dog or a wolf that Dad swerved to avoid on our big drive out west?

Mom: Dog.

Sister: Dog.

Me: I always thought this was just a story. You know, to explain hitting the guardrail.

Sister: We were in Ohio. Who sees a wolf in Ohio?

Mom: Your father has never really been able to see at night, to tell the truth. One time we were driving home from the Oliver's after a holiday party and your father kept saying he saw *coyotes*—on the Jersey Turnpike.

Sister: Dad's always been weird about that stuff. Like the way he still Windexes the headlights before every big drive.

Mom: Or the way he calls everyone's high beams "bright eyes."

Sister: Right. *Hey, take it easy there, bright eyes! Whoa, give us a break, bright eyes!*

Dad: Your mother reads your diary.

VII. The thing we never talk about.

Me: The thing we saw at the beach house, right?

Sister: Right.

Me: I'm still not sure I saw it. But I guess I must have.

Mom: If it's anything you'd like to know about, your father and I are more than glad to talk about it. We've always thought you might ask about it someday. Or you can choose not to. We'll leave that up to you.

Sister: We thought you were getting sick.

Me: The door was open.

Sister: We walked right in.

Me: There were candles on the nightstand. And Mom in that—

Sister: That's called "role playing," right?

Dad: You know what I remember most about that trip? The funny guitarist who sang us all those songs in that Mexican restaurant. Remember him? Boy, that guy loved to sing! I kept hoping he'd go away after a while, but no, he always had another song at the ready, like a human jukebox, you know? I bet he's still there today, singing his crazy songs. There was that one about the specials. That's the one I remember most. *Ole!*

VIII. What we'd do without these debates.

Mom: I don't know. Talk?

Dad: *Uno* Olympics!

Sister: Learn about each other?

Me: Cry. **F**

Catherine Carter

Maytide: The Orgy

Their bodies may be made
of fossil light, but today the blades
and ovals and palms of the leaves
are drinking their meal fresh
from the sun, like some great mild
cow, and the milk none the worse
for running ninety-three
million miles. And with the sweets
(how human!) comes love:
even the elms blush at sugar,
flush gold and wave their fingers
in its sweet rush. It is
promiscuous and innocent, excessive
and splendid, the love-in
of these people who lip the sun
like syrup, whose sap runs
with it. It is a great
tumble and splash, a chaos
of desire and delight; the pinks bathe
in the passion of oaks,
the doghobbles' semen blooms
mingle with peonies.
Spilling lace, pouring dust
and breath, gone gold with light,
the trees are making love
everywhere, all day, all night.

John M. Anderson

Map of the U.S.

after Jasper Johns

The country lies like the carcass of an animal
with its head twisted off above the neck of Maine,
Florida reaching still for a footing in Cuba, the udder
of Texas hanging heavy with milk, yucca milk,
sand. Dotted state lines mark a butcher's plotting.

What beast is this with its bony rump propped
on Mexico's fat barstool? Hawaii
sweetmeats, laid aside to fry up later
in so many swirling onions of surf. Alaska, chunky
albino buffalo head frosted with freezer burn,
too big, left over

from some other hunt, lying with its narrow tongue
disintegrating into islands way out above the tailbone
of Seattle. Now jittery hurricanes climb the Atlantic seaboard
like babies up the belly of a dead marsupial. Tornadoes
punch the supine creature in the breadbasket.

The Mississippi delta, the country's
fertilemost point drains continually,
somehow astern of the udder, but down right
in relation to the big blue ox-yoke of Great Lakes,
to the Rockies' ribs. Even slaughtered,

it's too stubborn for a lamb ~ its sway back smooth
as an ass's back, its thicker hind legs braced
like a heedless donkey's against compulsion.
Its beating heart everywhere and nowhere, unlocateable,
hammering away.

Rise, Great Ape!

So there he was, the famous zoologist from all those PBS and National Geographic programs, respected the world over for his seminal studies of African lowland gorillas, author of a dozen important books, someone who made Jane Goodall and Dian Fossey look like inadequate weekend hobbyists — there he was with his dying gorilla draped across his shoulders like a two-hundred pound hirsute backpack, raging into the E.R., his eyes aflame, his tennis-ball-knees protruding through his khakis, ready to buckle under the tremendous strain. The doctors and nurses, and our favorite security guard Josepi, all paused in surprise, and I was the only one who managed to say anything, incomplete though it was: “Is that . . .?”

Lucky for us it was a slow night: one husband stabbed in the shoulder by his wife, one drunk frat boy with a broken ankle and abrasions, and an unseemly obese woman who was claiming to have accidentally swallowed her kitten . . . and now in comes Richard Muller, Ph.D., with his unconscious pet gorilla. He was yelling, “His heart! His heart has stopped!” As the doctors and nurses moved a little too slowly, and Josepi just stood there unsure of *what* to do, I grabbed a gurney and wheeled it over to Muller, who slid the animal awkwardly from his shoulders and nearly crushed himself — crush wounds are the most problematic — while I held the gurney in place and looked around at my colleagues, who were every bit as perplexed as I was. Doctor Bloomenthal was in charge that night, and judging from the way he reacted — that is to say, *didn't* react — he was terrified of the animal. He tried to say, in his newly enfeebled voice, “This isn't a veterinary clinic,” but Muller started screaming at him, “Do something! For God's sake, don't just *look* at him, do something, you twit!”

I had never been that close to a gorilla before — he was an awesome sight, even in unconsciousness. Bloomenthal dropped his charts — literally dropped them to the tile — and we both hurried the gurney into the O.R. while Muller trailed behind us, clutching wildly at his gray mane. I can't say if he was fatigued from hauling the animal, suffering from a partially-healed spinal injury, or what, but I swear Muller actually walked like a gorilla: that is, he kind of waddled in a bow-legged manner. Bloomenthal's face was funny: he kept glancing down at the animal as if to say, in the most nonchalant fashion, “This shouldn't concern me. No, certainly not,” all the while his stethoscope on the animal's chest. He tried several times to ask Muller what had happened, how long the heart had been stopped, but all Muller could say was, “Save him! Save him, goddamn you!”

Rhonda, the head nurse and my lover of one month, followed us into the O.R. and asked Bloomenthal what the hell she should do. Bloomenthal's

right hand was busy with his stethoscope, and his left hand was busy pressing Muller back, because the guy seemed ready to crawl onto the table with his pet. When Rhonda looked at me I could only shrug stupidly, and that's just what her expression told me: thanks for nothing, stupid. So she readied a ventilator mask, waited to start C.P.R. and I guess just pretended that it was a routine cardiac arrest. I nabbed Muller and tried to pull him gingerly out of the O.R. so Bloomenthal, Rhonda, and the others could work the wonders of medicine, but the guy was mighty as an ox; or, more befittingly, mighty as an ape, with bulging back and shoulder muscles. I remember thinking: I hope I'm in this kind of shape when I turn sixty.

And then, still in a panic, Muller caught me evenly across the temple with his right elbow, and that was it, I was down for the count.

When I woke several minutes later I was in a hospital bed with a cold pack on my face – not on my head, mind you, but on my face, which I figured was Rhonda's idea of a joke. After Muller had clocked me, Josepi rushed in and tackled him senseless, and then another doctor and nurse barged into the O.R. to help Bloomenthal and Rhonda revive the gorilla. The ventilator mask wouldn't fit over his nose and mouth, so they began intubation, shaved his chest, wrists and ankles to hook up the E.C.G. leads, pumped him full of Epinephrine and then fired up the jumper cables to shock his heart back into a regular rhythm – I could somehow hear, even in my blacked-out state, Bloomenthal yelling *Clear!* Now the gorilla was lying sedated on the gurney, its steady simian pulse bleeping in green on the monitor, the respirator in motion.

It took me awhile to clear my vision and cool away the ache on my temple, and then I went out into the waiting room. Muller was sitting handcuffed in a chair, looking exhausted and slouched like someone bereaved. The obese woman who had eaten her kitten, the idiot frat boy and the unlucky husband had disappeared – probably scattered like roaches in the light as soon as they set eyes on Muller and his anthropoid.

Things were quiet out there in the waiting room, which was a relief, since employees from other wings of the hospital had made an exodus into the O.R. to behold the gorilla. Josepi – who once told me that he had trained old-school with ninjas in Japan – was standing watch over Muller. As I approached, holding the ice pack to my injury, Muller said, "I'm sorry, so sorry, young man. Please forgive me. I thought I was going to lose Lange."

Yes, it's true: Muller had named the gorilla Lange, after Jessica. When I took a seat next to him I said that I was fine and not to worry about it. "I've seen you on TV."

"I'm sure," he said. "I'm sure you have."

"You live around here?"

"I do, just a few miles away actually, past the reservoir. We bought the place last year after returning from Gabon."

"Hey, Josepi," I said, "are those handcuffs really necessary? The guy was just upset, that's all."

"It's not up to me, Lou. Dr. Bloomenthal said he wants the cuffs on til the cops get here."

When I asked him why the cops were coming, he said, "Don't ask me, ask the doc."

"It's okay, young man," Muller said. "I suppose I've caused quite a ruckus."

"Mr. Muller, if you don't mind my asking you, what in the world are you doing with that monkey?"

"That," he said, pointing down the hall with both hands, "is not a *monkey*, you mental midget. *That* is *Gorilla gorilla gorilla*, of the family Pongidae, of the superfamily Hominidae, the same superfamily *you* come from, though he's decidedly nobler, you can bet on that." He stopped, and then said under his breath, "Monkey. As if I'd waste my time with those howling little Cercopithecidae. Miserable bitches."

"Oh, well, sorry about that. So, what are you doing with that Gorilla-cubed then? And what's wrong with it?"

"*Him*. He is a *him*, not an *it*. Do I have to knock you out again, son?"

Josepi said, "Hey mister, don't make me put my ninja moves on you again. Be nice to the boy, he tried to help save your monkey. You see, Lou? That's why the doc wants the cuffs on him."

After a convincing deep breath Muller apologized for calling me a mental midget and threatening me with more head trauma. "So, the problem with Lange," he said, "is a faulty heart, much too small, a rare genetic defect, almost unheard of in the wild. I've been with Lange for the past seven years; or rather, he's been with me, from the Congo to Nigeria to Zaire to Gabon. This has happened once before, in Zaire, about three years ago, and we barely saved him that time. Tonight, he passed out and I could feel the irregular heartbeat, so I sped here, hoping his heart wouldn't stop altogether."

"He seems healthy enough," I said. "He looks like he'd tear a man's head off."

Muller looked at me askance, was ready to insult me again, I could tell, and then said, "Adult male lowland gorillas are typically three-hundred pounds, son, and can get as large as four-hundred. Lange is only two-hundred; he is weak, so stop with this 'tear a man's head off' nonsense. Besides, gorillas are vegetarians, not carnivores."

"So you take care of him?" I asked.

"I do. He is the noblest of primates, stare into his eyes when he wakes and see for yourself. A shocking dignity. Shocking, I tell you."

"Oh, so let me get this straight, sir, I think I know what's going on here: all your years in the bush have made you less human and more animal, and the more time you spent there, the more you began to despise the human

being, the madder you became, sinking deeper and deeper into the mind of the beast, until finally, you could no longer recognize yourself or another human person, you were now an ape yourself, and when you came back to the states, your wife left you, your children scorned you, you were . . . *the abominable savage*. Am I right?"

"No, you're a horse's ass, I'm glad I knocked you out. My wife and I have been married thirty-five years, we have four adoring children and six strapping grandchildren. So pull your head out of the mud, son, if you want me to talk seriously to you."

"Sorry," I said.

Just then Officer Mac came strolling through the automatic double doors with the static buzzing on his radio. We all knew Mac because whenever there was trouble at the E.R. he's the one who got sent. A month earlier he had to come square off with a man who showed up with a flame thrower and threatened to incinerate the place if we didn't stop sending overdue notices to his house. The flame thrower, it turned out, was a relic and didn't work, but Mac shot him anyway, and then flirted with Rhonda as I helped Bloomenthal remove the bullet from the guy's bicep. Everyone handled the kook with the antique fire weapon much better than Muller and his gorilla.

"Is this the suspect?" Mac asked me.

"I don't think he's much of a suspect," I said. "He's the famous Richard Muller."

Bloomenthal and Rhonda came around the counter and the doc said, "He assaulted Lou. And he has a large animal in the back there."

"I wasn't assaulted," I said. "It was an accident."

"What's with the animal?" Mac asked.

"The gorilla belongs to me," Muller said. "He has a heart condition. I brought him here because he was dying."

Mac said, "A gorilla with a heart condition. A man-nurse who says he wasn't assaulted. What am I doing here, Doctor?" He craned and caught Rhonda's eye and said, "Well, hey there, darling, how are you tonight?"

"Oh, I'm fine, just fine," she said, and meanwhile the heat was swelling in my guts because Mac had been sweet on Rhonda for weeks, even though the scallywag knew we were an item. And calling me a "man-nurse" was his idea of humor.

Muller said, "The Negro woman was instrumental in saving Lange. I'm indebted to you, young lady."

She snapped, "Who you calling Negro woman, Tarzan?" and made for Muller with a white-knuckled fist, but Bloomenthal took her arm.

I whispered over to Muller, "You shouldn't say Negro," but he seemed so oblivious – so *innocently* oblivious – that I didn't even try to explain it to him. Eons spent in the African equatorial jungle can rust a man's social graces.

"So, Doctor, what am I doing here?" Mac asked again.

"Officer, we have a wild animal strapped down and sedated in the O.R. and we have a nurse who was assaulted."

"The man-nurse says he wasn't assaulted, doc. And I don't know of any law that says a scientist can't seek help for his sick animal. Josepi, uncuff this famous person. Is the animal okay?"

"Yes," Bloomenthal said. "The heart rhythm was erratic and we lost a pulse for only a minute or more. It's stable now, but I'm not a vet, I don't know what's wrong with it. And I sure don't want to be around when it wakes up. We're running an E.R. here, not a zoo."

Rhonda and Josepi both snickered at that one. And then Muller said, "Doctor, that animal is not an it. Lange is a *he*, you boob. He is more a *he* than you are!"

Mac said, "Sir, how did you get your animal here?"

"I drove him; we don't live far."

"Okay, well then put your animal back in the car before he wakes up, drive on home, erase this from memory, and we don't have an issue anymore. Otherwise I have to call those Nazis at Animal Control, and it's nothing but a headache for me, paperwork this thick. Besides, it's not my business to tell a man he can't own a monkey if that's what he wants to do. I've seen you on the National Geographic show, and I quite like the monkey."

Muller, I saw, was summoning every last ounce of willpower in order not to detonate over the monkey comment. Josepi had removed the cuffs by this point and Muller was massaging his wrists. Mac said to Rhonda, "Why don't you show me this animal, darling? I've never seen one up close."

"He's not a spectacle," Muller said. "He's the noblest of primates! Show some respect, sir. He is who we've come from. Six to eight million years ago, *we were him*. Do you understand the significance of that? *We were him*. And since we've split from him we've forsaken all dignity. Just look at yourselves."

For a good twenty seconds everyone looked at each other in silence, as if taking in the consummate lack of dignity in that room.

Then Muller said, "I'll retrieve Lange and then be on my way. I've troubled you all enough."

"Oh no you don't," Rhonda said. "Not till you fill out these forms," and she shoved a clipboard into Muller's gut. "And don't think you're getting any special famous-person gorilla rate."

Bloomenthal cautioned Muller to seek the proper help for the animal, to which Muller said, "I've been in arrangement with several other scientists to get Lange a transplant. It shouldn't be much longer now."

I thought Bloomenthal was going to launch into a vitriolic tirade here, because organ transplants were a particular source of agitation for him. I could almost hear him cry, "A new organ for a monkey! When thousands of children die every year for want of new organs? Oh, the inhumanity of it all!"

Shortly thereafter I helped Muller load Lange into his SUV, the engine still humming in the parking lot, the headlights illuminating a handicap sign. I didn't think it wise to release Lange after such an incident, but protocol becomes obsolete when the patient is not a biped. We sat Lange upright in the back and Muller pulled the seatbelt over him. Lange looked ridiculous with his shaved body parts, but the feel of his short hair and the heft of him in my hands was remarkable — it stroked a space inside me previously unreachable, as if I was a father holding his firstborn — and although I would have liked to see Lange bounce around and gobble up bananas, I think I understood why Muller had such affection for him.

"Thank you, young man, thank you," he said. "You haven't had the chance to look into his eyes, but once you do, you'll see what I mean. It's life-changing, to look into that animal's face and see yourself. The cosmos suddenly becomes clear, clear like never before. He is our brother."

"I believe you," I said. "I believe you."

"Ah, yes, you *say* you believe, young man, but you haven't *seen*. We have ten acres just beyond the reservoir, left on Valley, right on Rockside, number 420. You're welcome to visit, and after assaulting you, I must be a gentleman and extend the invitation. Bring the Negro woman if you'd like."

"Hey, how did you know that we . . . that she and I . . ."

"Ahhh, I'm a student of the human animal, I know these things. I saw how you two looked at one another. The eyes, my boy, the eyes give it all away. I've spent decades gazing into the eyes of the higher primates, and I know what I see there, be it hunger, happiness or hate."

"Well, hey, Mr. Muller, let me ask you a question then, just between you and me," and I lowered my voice here. "The eyes that you saw Rhonda look at me with, did she look at that asshole cop with the *same* eyes?"

He touched my shoulder then, winked, and said, "Nothing to fear, son, nothing at all to fear."

WE FINALLY GOT BACK TO RHONDA'S townhouse around one in the morning, ate some leftover chicken lo mein, showered together, and just when I thought we were going to collapse naked on the goose down, she slipped into her pajamas and grabbed, of all things, a goddamn National Geographic magazine. Never mind that the shower had been a loveless flash and the ride home a meditative quiet time, I figured, with the most male and animal part of my gray matter, that sex was still in the cards. So, then, the three words I had come to dread more than any other: "What's wrong, Rhonda?"

"Don't make me tell you, Lou. Let's just pretend we're real tired and can't wait to fall asleep."

Of course I told her that that wasn't going to cut it, and she said, "Okay, fine," and slapped the magazine shut. "How long have we been dating?"

"About a month," I said.

"And how long have you been working at the E.R.?"

"Same amount of time."

"Okay, and what's happened at the E.R. this past month, since you started working there?"

"What's happened? You mean besides the usual?"

"Yes, besides the usual."

"You mean the flame thrower?"

"And what else, Lou?"

"You mean the gorilla tonight?"

"And now tell me the things that have happened to me this past month."

"The things?" I asked.

"Yes, what sort of shitty things have happened to me this past month?"

"Well . . . you had a flu for a week."

"Ten days, actually. What else?"

"Ummm . . . you got a flat tire on your car. The pipe busted in your bathroom and ruined everything. Ummm . . ."

"Yes, okay, that's enough. Now ask me the last time I had a ten-day flu, got a flat tire, had a busted pipe in my bathroom that ruined everything, got nearly burned alive with a flame thrower, watched a man get shot right in front of me, and was in such deadly proximity to a gorilla."

"But the flame thrower didn't work and the gorilla was out of it."

"Just ask me the last time, Lou."

So I did, and she said, "Never. Never in my life has any of those things ever happened to me. And in addition, I was called a Negro woman tonight, something else that's never happened to me. I felt my mamma roll over in her grave when he said that to me."

Half a minute of silence, and then, "What are you saying, Rhonda?"

"What I'm saying is this: you're bad luck, Lou."

Now, here was my chance to pour forth with something sapient and pragmatic, something about a person making her own luck in this indifferent world, something about the mind-boggling randomness of an immeasurable universe, the rash capriciousness of history, and possibly even bring superstring theory and the space-time continuum into the picture . . . but I couldn't do it because my stomach somersaulted and my mouth became cotton, and all that chicken lo mein suddenly seemed like a very wrong move.

"But I love you," I said.

"Lots of men have loved me, Lou. Black men, white men, construction workers and doctors. But not a one of them has brought this . . . this . . . *ominousness* into my life."

Okay: when someone hurls the word "*ominousness*" at you in relation to your very existence — and it is a *hurl*, make no mistake — your chances of rectifying the matter under discussion all at once become zero. I, all at once,

became a zero.

I said, "Is that why you put the ice pack on my face instead of on my head?"

"I put it on your head, it must have slipped down. Is that all you have to say, Lou?"

"Well, Muller said he saw you looking at me tonight with love in your eyes."

"Muller? That crazy Tarzan doesn't live in this world, Lou, nothing he says matters any."

"But he's famous," I said.

"Not in my life he's not."

My newly acquired zero-ness notwithstanding, Rhonda eventually allowed me to enter her that night, although she made it clear beforehand that our affair was officially on hiatus until I could prove (somehow) that I wasn't a strike of lightning intent on electrocuting her. But when I was about to fall asleep with Rhonda's naked form nestled beside me, I did not try to fathom the ways I could exonerate myself of her charge — since she and I both knew that I never could — nor did I ponder the scrambled messages she was serving up like so many hot cakes.

But rather I fell to thinking about Muller and how he had lied to me about glimpsing love in Rhonda's eyes. For whatever reason, I felt betrayed by him, this massive intellect who — to my mind — perhaps knew more about the human being than any other person alive. I had recently read his book called *The Ape in Us*, and Muller believed that every question about modern people could be answered by studying our ancestors and the stages of human evolution: our desires, our needs, our joys . . . our murderous follies.

So I said to myself, "Come first light, I'm going to pay that monkey man a little visit."

WHAT A PLACE HE HAD: a brick Colonial with a sprawling wraparound deck, a barn complete with hay and the upper X, all set far back from the road, his nearest neighbors a six-point buck and a wily groundhog. He wasn't surprised to see me there on his stoop when he answered the door holding a mug of still-steaming coffee, but my expression must have shown him that I was nettled, because he asked what was wrong and I barked, "Student of the human animal, huh? You know what you see in the eyes of a higher primate, huh? Well how's this for your keen perception: Rhonda doesn't want anything to do with me."

"Did I suggest otherwise?"

"Uhhh, yeah, you did. You told me I had nothing to fear, that you saw her eyes had love in them for me."

"No, you're mistaken, my boy. I said you had nothing to fear in regards to that pesky policeman. And I said I knew you two were romantically involved

by the way you looked at each other. I never said a word about love. What I saw in her eyes was not love."

"Well what was it then?"

"Frustration, impatience, uncertainty. These are what burn in our eyes when we behold our lovers."

"Oh, well that's just great. This is all your fault, thank you very much. Your gorilla pushed her over the edge last night, she thinks I'm bad luck because of it. She actually thought Lange was going to wake up, wield a scalpel and turn that place into "The Murders at the Rue Morgue." And if he had, it would have been *my fault*, since I'm bad luck."

"Bad luck, huh?"

"Yes, bad luck, that's what she says."

I realized then that Muller was still wearing the same clothes as last night, though they were cleaned and ironed, and I wondered if, like Albert Einstein, he owned a whole closet full of just one outfit: khaki pants and white button-up shirts – a veritable Gap advertisement. He invited me in for coffee and after my own convincing deep breath I accepted and then apologized for my misguided lovesick rant, which he said he understood and forgave, since he himself had been guilty of many such rants during his own impetuous dawn of youth.

Once inside I expected to encounter a whole treasure trove of African artifacts stuck to walls, jutting out from corners and perched aloft bookcases – chilling tribal death masks, eight-foot feathered spears and knee-high painted jugs – but there was nothing of the sort, just your quotidian framed photos of beamish gap-toothed grandchildren in Oshkosh overalls. And of course there was the compulsory photo of Lange, who actually appeared to be posing for the camera. The rooms were so sparsely decorated it was as if they had just moved in yesterday and had forgotten to pack up their previous house.

Muller poured me a mug and then quickly ushered me onto the back deck so we could gaze lovingly across the yard at Lange lounging in a raspberry bush beneath a tree. "Look at him," Muller said, "just look at him."

"Well, is he feeling better?"

"Oh yes, he's fine, I'm sure. His appetite was strong this morning, and that's the best sign of health, as anybody knows."

I, however, didn't know that, since I had an aunt whose appetite was so mighty she ate herself to death: arteries stuffed with scraps and vital veins bursting in all kinds of important places. I was half-tempted to tell Muller that I thought the best sign of an animal's health was when its heart didn't all of a sudden cease beating, but I hadn't gone there to rile him up.

"Doesn't he run away?" I said.

"Run away? Why ever would he do that? This is his home."

After that Muller took it upon himself to explain to me, at great tedious

length, how our state's climate was perfect for Lange, and his speech was choc full of references to barometrics, levels of humidity, various weather systems and body temperatures, flora and fauna and insect populations. That was the reason he had bought a house here, so Lange would feel at home, and it left me wondering about the animal's intelligence: if he could mistake these ten acres for the African lowlands, he must have been the anthropoid equivalent of a retard.

"So, are you ready, young man?"

"Ready for what?" I asked.

"To look into the eyes of Lange, to have your universe enlarged, to see into the soul of the being you came from, to be irrevocably changed, to experience what most of the world never will."

"Uhhh, yeah, sure," I said, "I'm ready for all that. I think."

We left our mugs of coffee on the deck and went out into the backyard. The wily groundhog darted behind some trees to our left, and I saw Lange turn his head to watch it. I could not keep my pulse from accelerating as we approached, nor could I control the anxious anticipation in my stomach. Muller noticed my hesitation and reassured me that I was in no peril, but just in case he was wrong, I thought: if the thing tries to slaughter me, I'll punch it in the chest Tyson-style, stop its ticker.

Lange was plucking raspberries and plopping them into his enormous mouth one by one, those saber-like incisors flashing in their impressive whiteness. When Muller called to him, he ambled out of the bush and came to us, at which point they hugged each other — and I mean the gorilla *returned* Muller's embrace, his arms around his keeper's buttocks, an act I found extraordinary in its tenderness, not to mention utterly beguiling. Then Muller introduced me and I petted Lange's head — just as I had done to countless dogs — these asinine words leaving my mouth before I could censor them: "Hey there, big fella. You're a hairy guy, aren't you."

Lange stood there in sentinel position, hands firmly planted in the grass, powerful back arched, head alert, not in the least self-conscious about the shave job Rhonda had done to his chest and limbs. Last night under the disgusting fluorescent E.R. lamps, Lange's hair was an ugly washed-out black, but out here under the day's new sun I relished the gorgeous ebony tint, and then realized it was the same color as Rhonda's hair — a fact she would have been none too pleased to know, but which nevertheless struck me as beautiful.

"Okay," Muller said, "now, gaze into his eyes, tell me what you see."

I crouched down some and tried to catch Lange's stare but each time our eyes met he turned to look at something else, and even when Muller instructed him to look at me, Lange was interested in stimuli much more exciting than my plain face. And in the next instant he turned back to me and reached out to hold the back of my knees, pulling them into him, and

when I felt he climbed on top of me and slapped me around – playful slaps, nothing blood-hungry, his smile slowly unfolding. I tried to say Muller’s name a few times, because a waft of fright surged through my torso, but he was laughing: apparently Lange played with every guest this way. So with some inspired bravery I began returning his slaps, lest Muller suspect that just because I was a male nurse I was also a pansy. We wrestled like that for half a minute, his long palms spongy like bike gloves, and then the terror returned when Muller said, “Wait here, I’m going to get my camera,” to which I wanted to wail, “No!” But he trotted back up to the house and both Lange and I watched him go.

Lange had stopped playing and was glancing around, as if not knowing how to hold a conversation with me now that Muller wasn’t there – a feeling I had experienced two weeks earlier when Rhonda left me alone with her father at the kitchen table: I heard myself say something about how much I admired Martin Luther King, and the man just shook his head in unadulterated disgust.

I reached out to pet Lange’s hide and when I did he sat in the grass and was once again not interested in my presence. He would not give me the satisfaction of letting me sink into his muddy eyes, but rather kept his head lowered as if in dire contemplation. Then I noticed his lids close, and he began to sway left to right ever so slightly. I said his name and several seconds later watched him collapse over on his side, the worry and dread clogging my esophagus so that I could not call out to Muller. But rather I sprang into motion, took him by the shoulders and laid him flat, pressing my ear against the rectangular bald spot on his chest. No heart beat, no breath, the looming inevitability of mouth to mouth, my God, I could not do it, and I turned frantically to see if Muller was on his way, since I was certain that he would swap spit with Lange while I compressed his chest.

What happened next is the reason I have become what I am today, the reason I have traveled broadly and soared leagues above the mundane, above my status as man-nurse, and yes, even above needing the sex and affection of Rhonda: I laid my right hand on his chest, only checking to feel if his heart was still dead, and when I did – just two seconds *after* I did – the organ began pumping again, the animal stirred, popped open his lids and looked at me. There it was, the gaze Muller had been wanting me to behold: Lange and I locked eyes for a minute or more, neither of us blinking, and what I witnessed there in the cocoa glass had nothing to do with the cosmos or the human race as Muller had suggested, but rather with me, only me, *specifically* me. I recalled that years earlier some shithead in college had told me that my name, Lou, was short not for Louis, but for Loser. And yet here, before me, was the opposite of losing, the opposite of bad luck: I had, in my first Christ-like moment, raised that animal from the dead. He was no longer Lange, but Lazarus.

The previous month presented itself to me in the utmost clarity: my being in Rhonda's life was not the source of her minor misfortunes, but rather I was responsible for her very life: the flat tire at seventy miles per hour did not send her car careening into a rocky ravine; her influenza did not transmute into pneumonia; the flame thrower was not operational; Mac's bullet did not destroy the culprit's jugular; and Lange did not wake to go on a rampage with a scalpel . . . *because I was there* — although, truth be told, I was at a loss to understand just how the busted bathroom pipe could have escalated into a deadly catastrophe.

Lange rolled over and resumed a sentinel position, seemingly undeterred by what had just happened. Then he was back in the raspberry bush, and I, still on my knees, was examining my right palm, holding it out before me like a champion fish just wrested from the depths of an ancient lake. The opposite of bad luck in my very touch, perhaps in my very person, in every breath I took. When Muller returned with the camera I held out my hand to him, and I said, with my brand new voice, "Touch me. Touch me and be cured."

F

Confessions of a Dimwitted Word Thief

I had lunch with Clodfelter," someone might say to me. "He's quite the raconteur." Even though I listen to the whole sentence, I absorb only *raconteur*. My brain pauses for an instant to savor the throaty sound and marvel at that extraordinary word's appearance in ordinary conversation. I stand momentarily muted, more intrigued by *raconteur* than by Clodfelter and his fabulous stories.

I play the word over to myself. *Raconteur*. I like this one. It feels full and round, a little whispery. Different. This is a word I can't think up on my own, because I deal in average vocabulary. The closest I get is *raccoon*, which I say often, but *raccoon* does not pack the exotic zing of *raconteur*. And I believe they have different definitions.

Words get in the way. They do things to me. I don't mean they merely spark my imagination, challenge my beliefs, and enlighten my understanding. I mean they *do* things to me. Some words are so unique, so singularly fit—so *right*—they pull me out of a conversation or a book and do a turn to amuse me, elegant ballerinas in the spotlight. Sometimes the sounds snatch my attention, and the words take on human characteristics: *Raconteur* sports a beret and a skinny mustache, *verisimilitude* wears a little black dress at a cocktail party, and *bazooka* smokes cigars and burps in public. Other times, the meanings of words grab me. I had not expected *expectorate* would have anything to do with spitting, or *restive* with not resting. The sparkle of these little linguistic jewels dazzles me, and briefly I stop—cease listening or reading long enough to admire how these stellar words brighten a dull sentence.

This is like going to a party and discovering something artful and bold on the serving table. There on a silver tray, in the company of the stone-ground crackers and California cauliflower, we spot fresh radishes carved into crimson daisies. Suddenly, we know we're not munching party snacks—no, we're having *hors d'oeuvres*. Me? I don't buy radishes. If you come to a party at my house, expect pretzels in a chipped bowl, no pretty vegetables, and lots of garden-variety vocabulary. "I've invited Clodfelter," I'll say to the guests. "He's quite the raccoon." I appreciate the efforts of the Radish Word Party People. They bring out the fine china—no use for that paper-plate *storyteller* when there's an exquisite *raconteur* in the cabinet.

Don't get me wrong. I'm talking here about good words—robust and salubrious words, not gargantuan ones. I grow suspicious when someone freights a sentence with *objectification*, *positivistic*, or *utilitarian*. Fifty-dollar words make me think of the price, not the value. When I hear a politician pledge "bipartisan cooperation in clarifying an agenda for the purpose of achieving measurable progress on behalf of the citizenry," I think, There's

no way I'll vote for this show dog.

Expensive words annoy me. Rich words enchant me.

Thus, an admission: When I hear an especially colorful word, a bona fide doozie such as *philandering* or *boondoggle* or *philistinism*, I feel a twinge of disappointment for failing to use it first. This is nothing severe—no self-abuse with my thesaurus or hasty mail orders for Verbal Advantage lessons. But I do experience a sub-surface recognition that somebody got their mouth on a savory word before I did.

Thus, a confession: I envy those people, the ones who use *mellifluous*, *viscosity*, and *prevaricate*. And *avuncular*, *correlative*, *profligate*, *symbiotic*, *patrician*, and most any—acious word—*mendacious*, *salacious*, *rapacious*, etc. I envy people who say *paramilitary* and know what it means (I picture a soldier with a parachute). I envy people who say *raconteur*. I have heard envy stands among the most malignant sins, exacting an exorbitant toll on the soul. If so, I am doomed. Word envy prompts me to take from others, claiming for myself the choice utterances of friends and strangers, colleagues and acquaintances, authors and performers. If I hear somebody say *wanton*, in no time I will go into the talking world and toss it around as if it were my own. "It is," I will sniff, "a wanton disregard for the truth—profligate prevarication by an avuncular yet patrician raconteur." I will not understand what I have said, but I will beam over how it sounded.

I don't consider this wanton use of other people's glittering words to be stealing. I call it larceny. In my mind, *larceny* takes the shape not of a convict but of a neighbor who borrows garden tools habitually and without permission, yet always intends to return them eventually. Someday. Possibly.

When I take words, I simply must not do it around those who said them to me first. If I do, they might punish me with fresh, Herculean words that reach even further beyond my lexical limits. As soon as they discover I have purloined their *oracular*, they will bring out *delphian*, sparking more envy and another turn in my ceaseless cycle.

These days, I am trying to work *serendipitous* into a conversation. A friend says it often, usually during one of his stories about a series of dire and complicated events that somehow broke in his favor, and once again all worked out to his benefit. "It's serendipitous," he'll say, as if that explains it all. I think of *serendipitous* as rider on a roller coaster—level, then going down, then thrillingly up, then down, and finally level again. I almost said *serendipitous* the other night, when I trumped up an excuse to leave a party early (there were no radishes). Unfortunately, the host was talking to my *serendipitous* friend, who was probably using the word at that moment. So I had to rely on my own words, small and ordinary. "I've got to go," I said. Later, I realized I would have hurt the host's feelings to say I was leaving the party on a *serendipitous* excuse. But I didn't say it, and I departed without disrespecting the host or getting caught in word larceny. I call that *serendipitous*.

I feel some guilt over my unauthorized borrowing of words, but I soothe my conscience with mental footnotes. When I say someone else's word, I slide in a tiny brain asterisk to acknowledge the owner. Each time I use *hubris*, I remember the unemployed construction worker who said it when I interviewed him on the opening day of bombing in the first Gulf War. I adore *lilliputian*, which a friend uttered when I handed her an unforgivably small cup of ice cream. I say *egregious* a lot—"It's an egregious violation"—and I remember hearing that one from a prosecutor who was trying to send a killer to death row. I like *egregious* so much that I scout constantly for violations of any kind (jaywalking laws, rules of etiquette, my sense of outrage), so I can huff with disapproval and announce, "What an egregious display of hubris. Egregious and wanton. Downright rapacious." That one is packed with footnotes.

I have a long list of credits. I inherited *cantankerous* from my great-grandfather. I took *sarky* from a cop on television. The only place I have ever seen or heard *snuzzle* is in *Wuthering Heights*, and I plan someday to write a scene that will make me the second author in literary history to employ that word. I will never forget the dermatologist who offered a dignified term for my sweaty palms: *hyperhidrosis*. I have been trying for years to slip *hornswoggle* into conversations, and when I finally do I'll tip my invisible hat to the man who taught it to me—Al Bundy on *Married . . . With Children*.

Several illustrious words in my possession . . . came from my friend John. I cannot say *recalcitrant*, *anaconda*, *furtive*, or *behemoth* without thinking of him. John once described a man as *orbicular*. I had never heard it, but I had only to look at that spherical man to understand the word's rotund meaning. Today when I say *orbicular*—and I say it often—a star shows up in my mind, crediting John.

Many other ripe words grab me, all for no reason other than their unique sounds. *Propensity*, *gregarious*, *hexagonal*, *amiably*, *narcissism*, *bombastic*, *impel*, *kleptomaniac*. The list has no end. I cannot hear *untied* without thinking that transposing just two letters makes a word with an opposite meaning: *untied*. The Untied States. Every time I hear *reconnoiter* I think the speaker has used not one word but three. I believe it is impossible to "reek an order," but I don't know what *reconnoiter* means because I can't get beyond its sound.

Often a word distracts me because the sound perfectly fits the meaning. *Diarrhea* does this, along with *stinky*, and, while we're at it, *toilet*, *clog*, *plunger*, and *suction*. *Raunchy* and *vomit* do well for themselves, as do *hooligan*, *smoldering*, *nugget*, *spineless*, and *counterrevolutionary*. The word *henchman* works because it describes at once the man and his duty—henching. The same goes for the *flunky*, the *lackey*, the *toady*, and the *bootlick*.

Coagulated. *Dilettante*. *Ephemeral*. So many words stop me, pull me aside, spin me in all directions. *Intractable*. *Munificent*. *Perpetuity*. From *aardvark* to *zygote*, countless logs lie across the path of my communication. The very words people use often separate me from what they're trying to tell me. *Serpentine*.

Unceremonious. Venal. Many folks can't see the forest for the trees. I can't hear the message for the words.

At a Chinese restaurant the other night, I noticed the Chicken with Tangerine Sauce (\$12.95). The menu described it this way: "Felicitous golen-yellow tangerine sauce bring a deliciously tangy taste to this dish." I ignored the missing *d* in *golen* and the obvious subject/verb disagreement. Who cares about spelling and grammar when there's a *felicitous* on the page? I marveled at that scrumptious word. I had heard food called savory and succulent and all other manner of mouthwatering adjectives. But never *felicitous*. This plate, this choice Chicken with Tangerine Sauce, did not just please the palate. It promised to brighten the heart. When the server came, I was so busy scrawling the *felicitous* description on a torn napkin that I absently ordered a different entree—something sweet and sour with pineapple and pepper. It was the next day before I realized my little dalliance with *felicity* had cost me the chance to consume happiness.

So I endure this affliction. I go on listening and reading, and inevitably those words—those orbicular words: graceful dancers, etched flowers—arise to thrill me and tempt me. I pause for them, say hello. I set them on the sensitive scale of verbal value—sound on one side, meaning on the other—and weigh them for their worth in the market of communication. Then I make them mine. **F**

Matthew Deshe Cashion

His Siren Sang a Cremation Song

He could not leave the house inside her head,
He could not leave her bed.
He could not get used to how her body held his hands.

Her music told his shadow:
Chase the smoke in search of windows.
But he could not leave her bed.

Voices fell from wallpaper and crawled
Downstairs
Where light was failing.

This is what he loved about her:
She said, "I think I smell something burning."
From their backs they shared big belly laughs.

She tossed his teeth into a skull
And shook the skull like a maraca.
His ghost began to dance.

She perfumed her sheets with stolen
Grave-songs in the key of E.
She tickled crickets' feet. She rubbed

The bullfrog's throat. Arias for the locust,
She arranged. In his defense:
Her lips were chipped from clouds.

The house inside the hole
Between her legs is where
He wished to hang his hat.

All the walls fell down. He did
The duck and cover, he did
The drop and roll. (He hid inside the hole).

The house inside her head was a house of mirrors
For the dead, but darker than a dream.
He could not leave the bed.

She swore his sweat would prevent their burning.
From their backs they shared big belly laughs.
He reached toward toes and pulled up blankets made of ash.

David Kirby

Astonishment, Even Pain, And Then Joy

There's a grafitto on the Via Pietrapiana that says, in bad Italian, *Muori per chi ti dona un bacio mio* or "Death to whom you give my kiss," a harmless threat, surely, one more figuratively rendered as "If you were to kiss anyone but me, I'll be really, really annoyed,"

only what fair-cheeked maiden would find that flattering?

There was a guy in my Louisiana high school who had been called White Roach so long that no one used his real name, and even the teachers would say "Date of the Revocation of the Treaty of Nantes? Anyone, anyone? White Roach?"

And yet he was handsome, in a Third Reich-y kind of way, so he caught girls' eyes, even when he told them that if they ever left him, he'd throw acid in their faces so no one would ever look at them again. But that John Lennon song was on the radio then, the one that says I'd rather

see you dead, little girl, than to be with another man, so the girls just laughed at White Roach because they knew he didn't mean it. And then his first serious girlfriend became a nun and the second a lesbian, and after that, it was no more serious girlfriends for White Roach,

and even though other girls entered the convent or started doing their dancing at the far end of the ballroom, they went directly to those destinations without crossing over the bridge that was the Roach Man, who had thus made it possible for the young ladies of our school to become holy sisters

of Christ or 90-mile-an-hour softball pitchers while bypassing the intermediate stage of grappling with White Roach in his father's Chevy and giggling at his threats of maiming and disfigurement. Here in Dante's city, hell is everywhere: demons claw themselves in the Volta di San Piero,

punishing their dope-starved bodies, and that night in the Cascine, a mini-skirted farm boy with pert breasts asks in a deep voice for help with "the rest of

the operation." White Roach, White Roach, were I with thee,
what new course would you chart for me?

You were a liberator, though you never knew it,
never knew that, as Edmund Burke wrote in 1757,
that which we call beautiful is elegant, graceful, delicate,
smooth, whereas the sublime is vast, rugged, difficult,
obscure, and produces surprise, even "some degree

of horror." Somewhere in this city, a 14 year-old girl sits down
to pasta with her parents, secretly as happy as
a hoopskirted belle in old New Orleans at the prospect of a couple
of young Creoles shooting themselves to bits at dawn
on the levee, and all because of her, who loves neither.

—Interview—
Natasha Trethewey on Facts, Photographs,
and Loss



Nancy Trethewey

Photo Credit: © E. Lichtenstein, 2004

Natasha Trethewey was born to bi-racial parents in Gulfport, Mississippi in 1966. When she was young, her parents divorced and she moved to Decatur, Georgia. At age 19 her mother passed away, which is something Trethewey writes about significantly.

She earned her B.A. from the University of Georgia in English, an M.A. in English and Creative Writing from Hollins University, and an M.F.A. in poetry from the University of Massachusetts. Her work has won numerous awards. Her first poetry collection, *Domestic Work* (Graywolf Press, 2000), won the inaugural 1999 Cave Canem poetry prize (selected by Rita Dove), a 2001 Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters Book Prize, and the 2001 Lillian Smith

Award for Poetry. Her second collection, *Bellocq's Ophelia* (Graywolf, 2002), received the 2003 Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters Book Prize, was a finalist for both the Academy of American Poets' James Laughlin and Lenore Marshall prizes, and was named a 2003 Notable Book by the American Library Association. Her work has appeared in *The Best American Poetry* 2003 and 2000, and in journals such as *Agni*, *American Poetry Review*, *Callaloo*, *Gettysburg Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *New England Review*, and *The Southern Review*, among others. She is the recipient of fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Bunting Fellowship Program of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

She has taught at Auburn University, the University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill, and Duke University where she was the 2005-2006 Lehman Brady Joint Chair Professor of Documentary and American Studies. Currently, she teaches at Emory University. Her most recent collection is *Native Guard* (Houghton Mifflin 2006).

I had the great pleasure of talking with Ms. Trethewey on a fall day in October 2006 during her visit to the University of Idaho.

Sara Kaplan: Poets find their inspiration from any number of sources—paintings and songs, for example. American history, or more specifically, southern American history, seems to be from where you draw much of your inspiration. Your poems re-interpret our history, however, not from the stance of an historian; rather, history allows you to create new language. In terms of your writing process, how much and how often do you commit yourself to researching your subjects? When does the research end and, you, the poet, begin?

Natasha Trethewey: I spend a lot of time doing research. In *Native Guard*, I had a historical question in mind about historical erasure. I began my research by reading American historians and looking at letters from soldiers during the Civil War, now housed at the Library of Congress.

In my second book, *Bellocq's Ophelia*, I looked in archival blue books as well as photographs. I feel, though, that there is a real danger in absorbing too much of the history and, in effect, the poems could risk sounding like history essays. Ezra Pound uses the term, "luminous details" to describe how we extract from history, from our reading in history, and how those details become transcendental. The details help the poem to be more than a little essay in history. I think of those luminous details. A visual equivalent is Roland Barthes theory of the punctum in a photograph. This is the spark, the thing that makes you begin to think of what's outside of the frame, and beyond what's captured in the photograph. I start with what's not there. The photograph shows everything that I can see, but there's also everything I can't see. What I can't see is what really interests me.

SK: And from there you begin to create a poetic story?

NT: Yes, from that absence, those gaps in history—those spaces that are yet to be filled in.

SK: Do you ever feel as if the research overwhelms the poems? How do you know when and where to omit facts or history?

NT: This was a problem when I was writing *Bellocq's Ophelia*. I learned a lot about the balance of historical facts and prosody during that time. I read not only history while researching for that book, but also theory. This got me into trouble. When thinking theoretically about photography and the gaze, I would sit down sometimes and write poems that sounded like theory. At a certain point, I realized I had absorbed as much theory as I could. I also don't have a great memory. However, I had read and underlined and I hoped that I would be able to recall the theory and facts. I pushed all the history and the

theory aside and didn't look at it again until I began to revise and needed to fact-check. I don't want to misrepresent something, make it anachronistic. Therefore, when revising, I try to use whatever I've absorbed from the facts and theory, but also focus on the imagery. For example, I was trying to write a poem and it was sounding like an essay in theory about photography and I finally scratched through it and I wrote, "stop it! Stop trying to write this theory and look at the photographs again." All I would allow myself to do was to look at the image.

SK: Dates appear frequently in your poems, particularly in *Bellocq's Ophelia*, but also in *Native Guard*. The dates in *Bellocq's Ophelia*, for example, evoke a journalistic quality since the poems are also letters. When you're writing, does the accuracy of dates and history and facts interfere with your creative energies? As poet, what kinds of liberties do you take with historical data?

NT: When writing *Domestic Work*, I felt the need to use dates because the poems are about my maternal grandmother and her life and work in Mississippi beginning in 1937. It occurred to me that her opportunities, the possibilities that existed in her life, had everything to do with a particular historical moment and her life as a domestic worker. The dates provide a very important context for the poem that should point readers to that historical moment that exists outside of the poem. This is why I started using dates. For example, in "Speculation 1939," I felt I could be flexible because the poem needed to be connected to the historical moment, the New Deal, which connects to the speaker's idea of imagining a better life for herself.

In *Native Guard*, I had a difficult time with dates because of the title poem, the sequence, *Native Guard*, which is heavily annotated in the back of the book. Even though the speaker is an imagined character, the events surrounding him were real. There are moments that I discovered that I had written something and the date that I had assigned to the poem wouldn't make sense with the historical events occurring in the poem. Therefore, I had to go back and make sure when the speaker is talking about one thing, it is what the speaker could have known. I don't know that I felt limited by it. I think it was an important way of getting at truth. Even though dates suggest a factual kind of truth, my desire to inscribe these stories of soldiers who were often forgotten or lesser known onto our landscape of our cultural memory, I needed to adhere to some of the facts so the imagined voice could take on the weight of a historical document.

SK: And the dates and the facts start to resonate with the poems. I like your idea of recalling the truth.

NT: If an audience wonders if the poems are true and ask, "did it happen," I say, "maybe, (pauses) is it true? Yes." Because I'm interested in historical memory, I don't feel like I can contribute to that by being historically inaccurate. I want to get as close to what is plausible or what could have been.

SK: *Belloq's Ophelia* and *Native Guard* are cohesive as books, but the poems also stand alone. When you compose poems, do you consider a larger manuscript or do you write poems and then see how they might work together?

NT: I like to think of myself as a poet who writes not collections of poems, but books of poems. I have always been this way. When I was in graduate school, I wanted to envision a work as an integral whole, and I remember talking to my thesis advisor who said to me, "just who do you think you are? You just need to go in your little apartment and gather up every single poem you've ever written and throw them up in the air, and wherever they land, scoop 'em up and that's your book of poems." That bothered me so much because I felt like the books I had admired, the things I had read seemed to be whole because weren't simply made up of disparate parts. And I think they were whole because we have obsessions. My obsessions are driving every individual poem I write. I like doing research. I like setting my mind to some new thing I want to find out about. I like occupying my time with reading history about this or that, so I tend to set myself a goal with some question I am asking. In my mind, all the research I do is swirling around trying to answer that question I've given myself.

Another way of thinking about what I do—do you remember in the 1970's they made these picture cubes of plexi-glass and you could slide a photograph in every surface of the cube and you could look at each individual photograph, you could hold it up and turn it around.

SK: Like a kaleidoscope? I was born in the 1980's. Are you referring to one of the Fisher Price camera toys?

NT: Well, no, it's just a plexi-glass cube where you could see each part that made up the whole of the cube. At the center of that cube, there is the question, that obsession, that thing that's driving me and each facet of the cube, each surface. Each poem is trying to connect to the others to create a whole. Each poem is like a separate answer and they're all necessary. And if you take out one of them, there's going to be a blank space. Because I write like that, I can very easily see what's missing so that the book becomes a whole.

SK: The stillness of the body seems to be important in all of your books. In "What the Body Can Say" in *Native Guard*, you write, "What matters is context—" Can you speak about how you bring context to the stillness of a body—whether it's in a photograph or someone dying?

NT: I think you're right to point to the idea of the stillness of the body in photographs, or the stillness of a body represented in a statue. I always look at those things and then desire to animate them at the same time. The very first poem in *Domestic Work* is about a photograph where the woman wasn't holding as still as you're supposed to be and she moved. There's a white swirl and this made me think that there is that photographic stillness, but there's also something in her gesture that animates her. This doesn't trap her in time and space so much as it allows her to enter into our own time and space interactively. What matters are how things are juxtaposed.

SK: Your lines are beautifully metered and this musicality lends the poems to being read aloud. You also employ a lot of forms. However, in your series of sonnets in "Native Guard" and the villanelle, "Incident," you also play with these forms. Can you speak about the benefits as well as the difficulties of using regular meter and form in terms of composition, but also reading poetry aloud?

NT: I'd like to believe that I have a good ear, but an intuitive ear, and that's perhaps a blessing and a curse. I can remember being in New Orleans years ago with my father when I was just starting out and thinking of myself as someone who wanted to write poems seriously. My father and I were walking through the quarter and through some open doors we could hear strains of music coming out and when we walked by one door there was a woman singing. We could hear her and I remarked that she sounded beautiful, but that I hated that I couldn't sing. My father said, "you can't sing? How can you be poet if you can't sing?" I carried that around with me for a long time asking myself that very question, "how can I be a poet if I'm not musically inclined in that way?" And that's when I began to realize I was musically inclined but it manifested itself differently.

I think of myself as someone who has a hard time with meter and scansion, with my own or other people's. It doesn't come naturally to me. I have to work at it very, very hard because I don't hear that way. I'm definitely a foot-tapper. When I read I'm tapping my feet because there is a music that I'm hearing. Writing sonnets in syllabics is one way that I think that I have harnessed whatever my own music might be or my connection to meter. I decided that I would first focus on a ten syllable line and then I was hoping that being an English speaking person who had read a lot of literature in

English, the natural cadence of iambic pentameter might come through. But it was training myself to think in a ten syllable line that allowed me to do that and once I did it, once I became comfortable in it, it was there.

I wish that prosody had been part of my M.F.A. experience. I think there are probably some places where they do teach classes in prosody; I just didn't go to one of them.

SK: Who are the poets you find helpful or influential and why?

NT: For *Native Guard*, in particular, I modeled my work after writers whose work was very important as a way of showing me into my own. Primarily I read Irish poets like Seamus Heaney and Eavan Boland because of their connection to place and to their geographies. The histories of those places for Boland, in particular, helped me discover what's left out or what needs to be given voice. I wrote my poem, "South" after spending a lot of time reading "North," the title poem of Heaney's book, *North*. I have a colleague who had helped to get Heaney's papers at Emory and he knew that I liked him, so he gave me copies of all of the drafts of *North* and I could see Heaney's thought process, what he was doing, and that poem spoke to me so much that I started writing "South" after reading it.

SK: I've noticed that photographs appear in all of your books. But you do more than translate an image. In *Domestic Work*, the first poem addresses a photograph, but there is movement beyond the photograph as you write, "the white blur of her apron/ still in motion." Bellocq's photographs of prostitutes inspired your second book, *Bellocq's Ophelia*. *Native Guard* begins with a photograph: "the photograph—who you were—." What is your relationship to photographs? Have they always fascinated you? How do you think they inform your poetry?

NT: I think I have always been obsessed with photographs for a couple of reasons. First, I never liked being in them, which is odd because I love them so much. I love them for their narrative possibilities, I love how they both reveal a version of something, but also conceal countless other versions. They speak most to me about absence, about what's not there, what's outside, what's behind. I thought for a long time that because the way people appear in photographs, because they're gestural, because we see people's bodies in a still motion of some sort that we can read into photographs who people are and where they're going. They carry so much figurative meaning.

A good example of this is a photograph that I have of my family when I was about 10 years-old. It's a photograph of my mother, my stepfather, me, and my

brother. My brother is probably not even two years-old. In the photograph it's obviously summertime because we're in shorts and my mother was wearing a little shorts jumpsuit-thing that was so '70's. We're at a relative's house, sitting on the sofa. This is not long after my mother had married my stepfather and then had my brother. It was around the same time that my stepfather told my mother that he wanted to adopt me so that I would have his name. I remember telling my mother that I didn't want to do that, and I wanted to keep my last name, my father's last name. Nothing was ever said about it, but I think that my stepfather resented that. Because I had a different name I was, in many ways, outside of the family. In this photograph, I am sitting on the far end of this 8' sofa on the right and they're all down on the left side. My mother and stepfather were both wearing big afros at the time because it was the 1970's and they're leaning toward each other looking at my brother who is standing up and balancing on the coffee table in between them. They're afros are touching and it creates this little triangle above him while I'm way down at the other end of the sofa. I think that photograph said everything about what it was like in that house at that time. And my position in it.

SK: What advice would you give to poets trying to publish individual poems as well as full-length manuscripts?

NT: To echo what a lot of editors would say, and perhaps you would say this too, Sara, it helps to read the journals you intend to submit your poems to. It sounds like bland advice, but it's true. I've actually had experiences of reading a journal and being so taken by a poem that they've published that it inspired me to write a poem of my own, and indeed that journal took it. There's a conversation that journals are having and you get to know something about the kind of work they're publishing if you read it before submitting your own work. I think that's very necessary. I'm not an experimental poet and it might be a waste of my time if I'm only sending my work to journals that are very interested in experimental poetics. To be familiar with the journal is very important.

I also think that even as you're sending around a manuscript it's good to be sending individual poems out too because you are developing an audience that way too. If your poems are appearing in different journals you begin to develop a large audience of people out there who have encountered your poems and they might actually go and buy your collection when you have it. I also think when you read particular poets you admire whose work is the kind of work that you want your work to be like or you see some kind of connection between your work and that poet's work, I think it's good to read the acknowledgments page and see where they've published those poems. That can help give you a sense of where you might send your poems.

You also know how it is these days. Most first books get published through those contests. Few places still have open reading periods for unsolicited manuscripts, but there are some of the contests that wonderfully will not only publish the winner of the contest but some of the runners up too. You almost get more for your money by paying their reading fee because there's more of a shot of being published.

SK: You write, "in my native land, this place they'll bury me" in "South," the final poem in *Native Guard*. Oftentimes we search endlessly for a place to call our own, through our memories, through photographs, a place to live and finally die. Sometimes we struggle against the very place that we love even though that's what we know the best. How do you think poetry can help us find our place in a land we may not fully understand?

NT: In dealing with my particular place, my south, my Mississippi, I have always felt exiled. It's psychological more than physical. I live in the deep south, I'm still there. I know that it's my place, but it's also not my place because of its history. There are things that would seek to make it not mine. But the poems allow me to own it. To call it mine. To love it and hate it very publicly and the poems create a space in which to reenter the site of exile and be home inside it. It's the poem that's the thing that we're in home inside of, all of us exiles in some way. Inside the poem I am most at home.

SK: If there's a question that you haven't been asked in this interview or other interviews, what would you like to be asked and what would your response to that question be?

NT: The things that come to my mind are things that I get upset about because I feel that many aspects of my poetry are being overlooked. I don't always feel like my work is taken as whole or that I'm taken as a whole. Perhaps this is a condition of being bi-racial. I feel that there is often a fragmented perception of my work and people can only focus on some part of it. If you listen to some people you'd be misled to think that this book is only about history or you'd be misled to think that this book is only about my experience growing up mixed race in Mississippi.

People tend to speak less of the elegiac quality of the book, that the book is about my mother, that everything in it, actually, is a way of making sense of what's buried. And what has no marker. No inscription on the landscape to remember. My mother doesn't have a tombstone. She is like those Native Guards. I want someone to say, "Natasha Trethewey is an elegiac poet." But people say I write only about race. That's what they say about black writers all the time. I'm just writing about the people I know about, the people to whom I belong. Nobody says any white poets are writing about the white race

because whiteness isn't a race to people, but it just so happens that people in my poems are black, so people say I'm writing about race. But, no. I'm writing about loss, history, and what's forgotten. However, it's always seen through some lens of blackness or race and I think that is a barrier to some readers, but not all of them. Some will only read through that lens and not see I'm many things at once: black, mixed, southern, woman, a daughter, a motherless child, all at once. If I didn't have blackness, people would go to the next thing, the next thing to focus on, but blackness just stands out there like the 8' guerrilla in the room.

SK: Or a white elephant.

NT: Or one of each.

Afterimage

Opening a library book, I find it full
of annotations, daring the margins
in pencil—a light stroke as if

the writer of these small replies meant
not to leave them forever, meant to erase
the evidence of this private interaction:

here a passage underlined, there
an odd-shaped star dotting the page
as in a night sky, cloud-swept and hazy,

where only the brightest appear, tiny sparks.
I follow its coded message, try to read in it
the direction of the solitary mind

that thought to pencil in a jagged arrow.
It is a bolt of lightning; where it strikes,
I read the line over and over

as if I might discern the little fires set,
the flames of an idea licking the page,
how knowledge burns. Here, beyond

the exclamation point—its thin agreement,
angle of surprise—there are questions,
the word why. So much is left untold.

Between the printed words and the self-
conscious scrawl, between what is said
and not, white space framing the story—

the way the past, unwritten, eludes us.
So much is implication, the afterimage
of measured syntax—always there—ghosting

the margins that words, their black-lined
authority, do not cross. Even as they rise up
to meet us, the white page hovers beneath—

silent, incendiary, waiting.

Invocation

How they rose early, a list of chores
pulling them toward the kitchen
in dim light—work that must be done
before the rest of their work be done.

How they walked for miles, down
the Gulf and Ship Island Line, toward
the beach, through the quarters, beyond
shotgun shacks, and into the city limits

where white children stood guard—sentries
on a margin of rail—muscling them off
the tracks. How they walked on, anyway,
until they waded into water, neck-deep,

though they could not swim—a baptism,
something akin to faith, the daily catch
keeping them afloat. How they tied the lines,
walked back and forth to find each cluster,

each glorious net of crabs. Across sand, the road
hot beneath their feet, then door to back door
they went, my grandmother and her siblings,
knocking, offering their catch, cleaned first

on the back steps, gutted—a display of yellow,
bright as sunshine raining down on the grass.
When my grandmother prepared crabs for me
I saw the girl she once was, her nimble hands,

food on the table in all those strange houses
along the beach. On our table: crabs, a mound
of rice steaming in a bowl, gumbo manna—
the line between us and them, between the whites

on one side of the tracks, us on the other, sure
as the crab lines she set, the work of her hands,
that which sustains us. Lord, bless those hands,
the harvesters. Bless the travelers who gather

our food, and those who grow it, clean it, cook it,
who bring it to our tables. Bless the laborers
whose faces we do not see—like the girl
my grandmother was, walking the rails home:

bless us that we remember.

— Book Review —

Natasha Trethewey, *Native Guard* (Houghton Mifflin 2006)

Our poets,” Charles Simic writes in his essay, “Poetry and Experience,” “are always saying: *This is what happened to me. This is what I saw and felt.*” Though individualism remains a quintessentially American trait, and one that is deeply interconnected with the cult of experience in American poetry, under the pen of ethnic and other minority writers the lyric mode is becoming increasingly communal and polyphonic. Trethewey joins the echelon of writers whose private *Is* can reach full articulation only through explorations of the collective. In her work, the personal is an extension of larger histories, its journeys and searches inextricable from the trials and tensions of the American South, its triggering sources embedded in national narratives that conceal distressful truths. The first two sections of Trethewey’s *Domestic Work* (2000) brought alive the South through memorable portraits of working class Blacks, especially women. In *Bellocq’s Ophelia* (2002), the poet reconstituted, mostly out of photographs taken by Bellocq circa 1910-1912, the lives of New Orleans prostitutes, many of them mulattoes. In this new volume, *Native Guard*, autobiographical poems both preface and follow poems that explore the complicated and unsettling history of Trethewey’s native South.

The first and last sections are lyrical and elegiac in tone, though the poems remain firmly grounded in tight narrative. Each poem’s emotional curve is prodded and sustained by a luminous, fluid, but also restrained diction. In the first poem, “The Southern Crescent,” that train takes Mother, and later Mother and daughter, away from Gulfport, Mississippi, toward an uncertain future embodied first by an estranged father who never shows up at the station and next by a white father whose marriage to his Black wife remains illegal in 1965 Mississippi. “Today,” the speaker recalls,

she is sure we can leave home, bound only
for whatever awaits us, the sun now
setting behind us, the rails humming
like anticipation, the train pulling us
toward the end of another day. (...)

The last poem of the volume, “South,” records the daughter’s return to this place, this “tangle of understory—a dialectic of dark/and light—” that both claims and disclaims her.

She returns
(...) to a country battlefield

where colored troops fought and died—

Port Hudson where their bodies swelled
and blackened beneath the sun—unburied

until earth's green sheet pulled over them,
unmarked by any headstones.

She returns to “Mississippi, state that made a crime” of her mixed race to undo the official history that made her complicit in its lies, a point she addresses with poignant clarity and economy in “Southern History.” She returns to Mississippi because, as the last two poems of the volume, “South,” and “Elegy for the Native Guards” intimate, she has taken it upon herself to be the Poet-guardian of the unsung Black soldiers, the marker on their “crude” or “water-lost” headstones. Moreover, as she suggests in “Pastoral,” a sonnet drawing on a dream in which the speaker is posing for a photograph with the Fugitive Poets, her identity carries the mark, or perhaps the burden, of an intense sense of place, of haunting locality:

Say “Race,” the photographer croons. I’m in
blackface again when the flash freezes us.
My father’s white, I tell them, and rural.
You don’t hate the South? they ask. You don’t hate it?

Like Quentin Compson in Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*, the speaker finds her identity anchored to a place and history that can not and will not allow her to elude the question. This volume itself reads as a most touching attempt to articulate an answer.

Many of the poems in this first and last section end in some small yet invaluable (self-)discovery or hard truth that could have very easily spilled over into sentimentality, but do not. In “Genus Narcissus,” for instance, the speaker recalls gathering daffodils on the way home from school, the bouquet a small but proud offering to her mother; at the fifth tercet the poem’s soft lyricism shifts, the episode is re-examined with chilling insightfulness, and the wistful tone becomes stark, self-reproachful:

Childish vanity. I must have seen in them
some measure of myself—the slender stems,
each blossom a head lifted up

toward praise, or bowed to meet its reflection.
Walking home those years ago, I knew nothing
of Narcissus or the daffodils’ short spring—

how they'd dry like graveside flowers, rustling
when the wind blew—a whisper, treacherous,
from the sill. *Be taken with yourself,*

they said to me; *Die early,* to my mother.

Here, as well as in subsequent poems dealing with the mother's life and death, the lyricism is intensified by the spareness of the narrative thread, by what is left out or only alluded to, by the silences implied in the recurrence of dashes and unanswered questions, and by suggestive details that indicate the presence of the unknown or the unutterable. A poem about body language ends,

(...) What matters is context—
the side of the road, or that my mother wanted

something I still can't name: what, kneeling,
my face behind my hands, I might ask of God.

In "Photograph: Ice Storm, 1971," the speaker's closing stanza, why on the back has someone made a list of our names, the date, the event: nothing of what's inside—mother, stepfather's fist?

questions the truthfulness and documentary reliability of photographs while providing, in just three words, "mother, stepfather's fist" the contours of an "interior" that could reveal, if photographed, a much more devastating kind of storm.

The middle section follows the Louisiana Native Guards, the first Regiment of which became the first sanctioned regiment of Black soldiers to serve in the Union Army during the Civil War, while the second and third consisted of men manumitted only months before. However, the Black soldiers who fell in combat were left unburied, and many others were fired upon by their white comrades. The four poems that compose this section read as a pilgrimage to this site of ambivalence, where dark irony overshadows and counters the affirmative impression one might receive as a tourist. In Vicksburg, Mississippi, a city that has become "a grave," "the dead stand up in stone, white//marble, on Confederate Avenue." Set off from the noun it modifies, the adjective "white" underscores the exclusionary aspect of this commemorative monument. That the dead "stand up" and that they are placed on Confederate Avenue compounds the irony.

The pilgrimage has commemorative as well as recuperative goals, as the first poem of this section, "Pilgrimage," suggests. Tourists "relive/ their

dying on the green battlefield," sleep in dead soldiers' beds, and, at the museum, marvel at the smallness of their clothes. The brochure markets this as "living history," but, as the opening and ending diction suggests, what the experience dispenses is reified knowledge, a simulacrum of history that, not unlike the white-marbled statues, presents truncated truths. The omniscient Old Mississippi responds to historical inaccuracy by changing its course and crawling away from the city "as one turns, forgetting, from the past." This image frames the poem, though its final recurrence is set against the image of a speaker less inclined, or rather less free to forget and to forgo the responsibility of recovering and reinstating those aspects of history that have been obscured or erased.¹ "In my dream, /the ghost of history lies down beside me//rolls over, pins me beneath a heavy arm."

In line with Trethewey's keen attention to the meaningful merging of form and content, the "Pilgrimage"'s staggered couplets—reflecting the Mississippi's meanderings but also the speaker's sinuous journey through history and memory—conclude with an un-coupled line ([the ghost of history] "rolls over, pins me beneath a heavy arm"), as if to suggest that the poet's undertaking has only commenced. And indeed, in the following piece, "Scenes from a Documentary History of Mississippi," the poet begins to recreate, out of photographs taken in the first decades of the 20th century, an imaginative but historically-informed narrative of the post-Civil War Mississippi. The four sections reveal a Black community that remains dignified yet barely hopeful in the midst of official duplicity, famine, a natural disaster not unlike Katrina, and demeaning segregationist treatment. In "King Cotton, 1907," a villanelle whose refrains underscore the bitter irony of the historic moment immortalized in the photograph,

(...)negro children ride the bales, clothes stiff with starch.
From up high, in the photograph, they wave flags down

for the President who will walk through the arch, bound
for the future, his back to us. (...).

The second section, "Glyph, Aberdeen 1913," ends,

(...) They pose as if to say
Look, this is the outline of suffering:
the child shouldering it—a mound

1 - In ethnic literature, ghosts are often associated with a traumatic past that needs to be re-addressed and properly dealt with. In the works of Toni Morrison, Lucille Clifton, and Louise Erdrich, for instance, stories of cultural haunting speak of racial injustice, the need for proper burial, and the need for some form of historical continuity that allows for the integration of the past into the present.

like dirt heaped on a grave.

In "Flood," whose stanzaic lengthening—an octave is followed by a nine-line, then a ten-line stanza—mimics the swelling river but whose tightly punctuated lines and off-rhymed cadences suggest an attempt at controlling the plight, the Blacks are "refugees from history" "*ordered/to sing* their passage onto land." "They are waiting to disembark" "the barge" that "has brought them this far," their immediate fate and distant future equally gloomy and unsure.

At the heart of this section and of the volume as a whole rests "Native Guard," a loose crown of sonnets² from which the volume takes its title. If through the figure of Beloved, the "sixty million and more" Africans and African Americans killed in the slave trade—and to whom Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is dedicated—are individualized, mourned, properly buried, and immortalized, so are Trethewey's Louisiana Black soldiers though the persona of "Native Guard." The poem is spoken—or rather written, since each sonnet resembles an epistolary or diary entry—in the voice of a former slave, now Native Guard soldier stationed on Ship Island (where a Union prison houses Confederate captives) and charged with writing letters on behalf of the illiterate POWs and his comrades. If in *Bellocq's Ophelia* the poet empowered one of her speakers (Ophelia) with a camera to subvert the male gaze and offer her own version of reality, here it's ink that allows her subject to write himself into history and re-write the history that has deemed him invisible. Unlike "the lure/of memory—flawed, changeful—," the written word wields power and authority. Significantly, he records his thoughts in a "near full" journal taken from a Confederate's abandoned home, the two narratives "overlapped now," vying for supremacy. The Confederate's words are "crosshatched beneath" (emphasis mine) the speaker's, the two stories intersecting on every page. Significantly, too, many of the illiterate white prisoners—"rebel soldiers, would be masters" "who would still have [their Black jailers] slaves"—have no choice but to borrow the words of this native guard-scribe to send home.

"A man, to be greatly good," Percy Bysshe Shelley noted, "must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others.... The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause." Poet and native guard share their capacities for empathy and in their admirable efforts to enlist imagination in the service of others. The native guard listens and

2 - Typically, a crown of sonnets consists of seven sonnets. The final line of each sonnet becomes the first line of the next one, and the first line of the first sonnet is repeated as the last line of the last sonnet. "Native Guard" consists of ten sonnets, and instead of whole lines it reiterates only fragments of lines. The first and last lines of the cycle, for instance, begin, and respectively end, with "Truth be told."

put[s] down in ink what [he] know[s]
 [the prisoners] labor to say between silences
 too big for words: worry for beloveds—
 My dearest, how are you getting along—
 what has become of their small plots of land—
 Did you harvest enough food to put by?

To Eavan Boland's remark that "the imagination is an ambiguous and untidy place," Trethewey might reply that so are history, memory, and even elements of material culture, such as photographs. Actually, if anything, in Trethewey's poetry the imagination helps order and manage a reality that may itself appear unimaginable in its cruelties and injustices.

In poem after poem, Trethewey searches for the form that can best balance the tensions and control the emotional heft of the material. The description of her mother's mutilated body ("What Is Evidence") takes the form of an imperfect sonnet, while the daughter's goodbye becomes a "Graveyard Blues." A poem about the Ku Klux Klan ("Incident") makes use of the obsessive refrains of the pantoum, an autobiographical poem about miscegenation and mixed blood subverts the ghazal's typically celebratory incantations, and the Black troops on Ship Island are immortalized in a rhymed twenty-four-line elegy. Trethewey claims and appropriates these traditional, "received" forms the way she approaches her subject matter: knowledgeably, tenderly, solemnly, with remarkable poetic skill and sensibility, and with an ease that seems unlabored, though we know it cannot be. Her *Native Guard* honors the overlooked history, oral culture, and bluesy rhythms of the Black South in precise dictions and perfectly mastered poetic forms, with elegance and poignancy.

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David Kirby

The Gift

near Selinunte, on the southern coast of Sicily

The *signora* who registers us (or me, since Barbara stays with
the car) is young and pretty and has an unwashed ripeness
that wouldn't work for the aged and charmless yet somehow
comes across as an asset in the young and pretty, and as
the days go by, I can't help noticing that her hair is pinned
in a way that says, If you think I look good now, wait till

I pull the pins out. Hers is the classic Snow White color scheme:
creamy skin, black eyes, red mouth. Hers is a Mona Lisa
smile and a Mona Lisa way of speaking, which is to say she listens
but does not speak at all, and when she does, it's only to say
something like "Your Italian is beautiful" or "I'm sorry
I haven't met your wife," but since the first statement

is untrue, I have my doubts about the second, though not about
the intensity in her gaze that I'd mistake for something else
if I were younger. The book I'm reading was left behind
by the last occupant of our room; it relates the adventures
of a guy named Dirk Pitt, who is the kind of hero who grins
his words instead of saying them ("I see you're wearing

a tight dress,' Dirk grinned knowingly") and spends the time
he's not in bed rescuing submarine crews and finding
Atlantis, and Barbara says, "What's that book about?"
and as I start to tell her about Dirk Pitt and his exploits, I wonder,
Why didn't the author just call him Dick Fuck?
Dirk Pitt spends much of his time fending off oversexed

temptresses who are often traitresses, not to mention
would-be executrices, not of Dirk Pitt's last will
and testament, but of Dirk Pitt. The other book I'm reading
now is Eric Newby's *Love and War in the Apennines*,
and when Eric Newby escapes from an Italian prison camp
and makes his way to a farm where he works in exchange

for being hidden and fed, among the regular farm workers
there is a man, Armando, and a woman,

Dolores, and after a few months of hard work, everybody
decides to take off one Saturday and go into town,
and they're all looking forward to this,
especially Armando, because he knows one or two girls in town

who will "do it," though he also speculates that Dolores "does it,"
even if she won't "do it" with him,
as Armando tells Eric Newby one day when they are out
plowing, and he says, "I'd like to screw her and screw her
and screw her and screw her and screw her," pounding
one of the bullocks on the flank with his fist for emphasis.

Eric Newby doesn't say what the bullock did—probably
nothing. The German playwright Friedrich Hebbel
said that in a good play, everyone is right, and I'm thinking
this is also probably so when real people are involved,
including, in most instances, the screwor and the screwee.
A third book, one I don't have with me right now

but whose many pithy statements I have copied into
the little memo pad I take with me everywhere,
is William Cash's *The Third Woman*, an account of
the romantic escapades of Graham Greene in which
Cash anatomizes in how'd-he-know-that detail
the lives not only of the celebrated novelist but also those of Catherine

Walston and his other mistresses and *their* lovers, observing, for example,
of two Jesuit priests who frequented the Walstons'
opulent Newton Hall, "It is mildly surprising that these priests—
who both seem to have been on call twenty-four hours a day
as her 'personal theologian'—couldn't have found slightly
more needy cases of spiritual help," just as he quotes

a later lover, Yvonne Cloetta, as saying of Greene's tiny London
bedroom and its big bed that "Yes, the room was not
very big and the bed was huge, so we could make love that way
or that way, you see," a comment which, even though
you are reading it far in both time and space from the site
described therein, makes you twist your head on your neck

as though to look at the phone-booth sized room, the bed
as big as the flight deck of an aircraft carrier,
the slightly tipsy middle-aged lovers gamboling and cavorting

and caracoling like ponies in a Shropshire meadow.

A friend of ours, on leaving forever the London she was so intimate with for years, said that a friend of hers

told her you always have your emotions, that it's a matter of deciding whether you will be on top of your emotions or them being on top of you. Same thing with screwors and screwees, one supposes, such as the Marquise de Brinvilliers who poisoned her family with a concoction she called *poudre de succession* or "inheritance powder,"

and concerning whom, even though I know no more of her than that she, too, appears in my little memo pad, I have always assumed a certain amount of screwing, at least in the metaphorical sense. When I check out of the hotel, the comely signora says again that she's sorry she never met my wife and lowers her gaze and then looks up at me and puts her hand

on mine, and it rests there just a moment longer than it should, and she says, "Don't go just yet. I want to give you something," and I say, "Wh-what's that?" and for a moment I wonder if she's going to take me into the back room and throw open a door that leads down wooden steps to the beach, where there's a boat waiting,

and we go to an island of which I'm the king and where I always get everything I want and at the very moment that I want it. Instead, she opens a drawer and takes out one of those little hotel sewing kits that has the needle and the buttons, one large and one small, and the three colors of thread: the black, the white, the red that no one ever uses.

OLD PEOPLE SITTING IN THEIR CARS

I think it was about seven months after I moved into the studio apartment on 18th Street that I started to notice out my window the old people sitting in their cars waiting. Where I lived – Dupont Circle – the streets were always parked up. A constant stream of cars circled my building like vultures. There was no rule of law. People swooped in from behind into a spot, ignoring cars waiting patiently in front, blinkers on. You had to position your vehicle behind the spot to avoid being poached, though I had seen cars back up the full length of Corcoran, flying backwards the wrong way down the one-way street, to steal. Fights were common – mainly harsh words yelled through cracked windows. No one ever got out of their cars. That was the easiest way to miss the next open spot. Occasionally, the aggrieved party would return to the scene later in the day, long after finding parking somewhere else, and express displeasure by keying doors and hoods, like petulant cats sharpening claws on couches. I have never been one who is capable of holding on to anger long enough to exact such revenge.

My building had an 18th Street address. But my windows looked down on Corcoran, which was little wider than an alley. Really, when cars were parked on both sides of the street, which was always, there was barely room for a third car to pass between them. Once I saw a Hummer try to traverse the way, stupidly secure in its perceived ability to go anywhere; it was stopped dead at a spot where two SUVs had parked across from each other, creating a blockage in the artery. Like a beached whale, it sputtered there for a moment, before wriggling backwards off the beach, into deeper waters. I remember yelling, take that gas guzzler, through my closed window and then feeling pretty dumb for making the effort.

Honestly, the parking situation didn't affect me much. I didn't have a car. I walked to work and restaurants and bars and the grocery store. And if I had to go further, there was the Metro.

I spent a lot of time that spring looking out my window, even before I noticed the old people. After the old people started to appear – after I started to notice – well, forget about it, I was obsessed.

It was the end of May when I started to see them, sitting in their cars, waiting for something, not with any particular urgency, but waiting nonetheless. They didn't have much in common, except for being old. There were men in suits and women in housecoats. One guy had a wild-eyed look and long wispy white hair that touched the collar of his dashiki shirt. One woman seemed dressed for church on a Tuesday night with crisp white gloves gripping the steering wheel and fresh flowers pinned to her best Sunday hat. Sometimes there was more than one on the street at a time; infrequently,

there were none. Other cars would pull up next to them, roll down windows, drivers and passengers asking if the old people were coming or going. The response, always unspoken, was neither. They were waiting.

It was the beginning of June when I began to wonder what they were waiting for. That was around the time I met Raven. The first time we met, she told me that her dad was a Poe scholar and her mother was an ornithologist and that Raven had been a compromise. I bought her another drink. She was in town for the summer for an internship. It turned out that we worked in buildings next to each other. So, we started to have lunch. Then we started to have sex. We'd go back to my apartment; she had three roommates.

Leave them alone, she said.

I had been looking out the window again. There were two of them out there, spaced respectfully away from each other down the street. As always, they stared out the front window at nothing in particular. It was unclear if one knew of the existence of the other.

I'm not doing anything.

You're bothering them.

Now this was a strange way to look at it. Here I was, watching Corcoran from the third floor of my apartment building. There was no way the old people knew I was watching them. They were sitting on a public street. It wasn't like I had binoculars and was staring into the windows of the townhouses across the way, which were crushed together, each one barely a single room wide, undistinguishable from each other, except for the one with the lime green door. That would be an invasion of privacy. I was just watching old people.

But Raven always saw things differently. She knew that I wanted to know what they were doing out there. And that was none of my business. So it was an invasion of their privacy and that's what she was talking about.

Rather than argue with her, I let her take my hand and lead me back to bed to have sex. Later, when she had fallen asleep, I crept back to the window. Those old people were gone, but a new one had arrived. I watched for about ten minutes as the woman sat motionless in her car until Raven stirred and rolled over and I went to the bathroom and then back into her arms.

June was a pretty good month. After July 4th though, things started to go wrong. I was worried about the old people. They were there at all hours and the heat was unbearable. Their windows were up and even though Raven assured me that they had air conditioning, I wasn't so sure. She was growing tired of them and me.

The old people all reminded me of my grandparents. When I was eight, I had four of them. By nine, none. Lung cancer, heart attack, car accident, and, though no one would say for sure I always suspected, suicide. By ten, they were gone completely from my mind, leaving behind only a faint residue, a thin film, of what old is.

In mid-July, Raven wanted to hold a dinner party. We carefully placed the futon couch on top of my bed and borrowed a table from my neighbor, who was therefore invited to join us. A friend of mine from work, a roommate of Raven's from school and some guy the roommate was dating rounded out the list. To be quite honest, I no longer remember any of their names.

Raven made a chicken cordon bleu from a cookbook her mother had bought her. I boiled spaghetti and microwaved tiny frozen appetizers that she thought looked elegant when arranged just so on a plate. The neighbor brought a salad; everyone else brought beer.

During a lull in conversation, I nonchalantly aired my concern.

Has anyone else noticed the old people on Corcoran?

Raven rolled her eyes.

Enough with the old people.

What old people?

The ones in their cars. They're always there.

Like a gang?

Everyone laughed as my neighbor started mimicking an old person rapping. He was a pretty funny guy. I didn't really like having him around.

Seriously, they're out there. Don't you ever look out your window? I bet there's one out there now.

Everyone got up and headed for the window, except Raven, who went to the kitchen to get the roll of cookie dough out of the fridge and pre-heat the oven. Sure enough, there was one right there on the opposite side of the street, staring into space, waiting.

Creepy, someone said. Everyone else nodded, slightly drunk.

It's always like that.

And you never see them do anything else?

Never. They don't get out of the car. They don't talk to anyone. I'll watch for a little while and then go do something. When I come back, they're gone. And new ones have arrived. There are always new ones.

Old people are slow. Maybe it just takes them a while to get out of their cars. Or to get the courage to pull out into the street.

Maybe they're all a figment of your imagination. Like you're stuck in the Matrix or something.

You're seeing them too.

Could be a mass hallucination. Maybe you're controlling our brains. Making us see them too.

Shut up!

Maybe they're spies.

It could be a surveillance program. They're watching someone on the street. Maybe they're watching you watching them.

Are they homeless? I read about a lot of old people who can't afford to pay for housing in this market. They could be living in their cars.

Does anyone want another beer?

Raven came out of the kitchen.

You know what I think, I said. I think that they're waiting for someone ... or something.

Now I had everyone's inebriated attention.

It's funny how I never see them talk to anyone. They seem to just be sitting there. Sometimes their lips are moving, as if they're talking to someone. But no one else is there. Maybe they're reviewing their lives. You know, cataloguing sins, preparing for judgment. I think that they are waiting for death.

I was greeted with half-smiles and smirks.

Like the actual grim reaper coming to your door?

Yeah, something like that.

Kinda like going through a death drive-thru? Would you like fries with your coronary?

Everyone laughed. I really didn't like my neighbor.

I'm just saying, I never see them leave and I never see them arrive. I just see them sitting there, waiting.

Raven twisted the knife.

So, death comes to Corcoran and takes them away. And takes their cars too? Maybe he runs a chop shop. Anyone want cookies?

Everyone did and the conversation ended.

That night, after we did the dishes and returned the table next door, Raven told me that she was going back to school in a month and that for ease of transition it would be best if we stopped seeing each other effective immediately. She said it just like that, those exact words. Later, for no particular reason, another night in another bar, her friend approached me and told me that the real reason was that I had become morbid.

Which, of course, was true. I had started to see the panoply of American mid-sized sedans as nothing more than coffins. Those old people were buried alive with a lifetime of memories in a metal box on wheels.

I stopped going to work. For the first couple of days, I called in sick. The job was not very interesting and I was not very important so it didn't matter much. I tried to stay at my window. I was determined to see what they were waiting for. But I have never been particularly attentive. It seemed every time I went to the bathroom or started watching TV or got a phone call or fell asleep in my chair, there was turnover outside. One replaced by another then another and another. I had never realized how many old people there were or how crafty they could be.

So, finally, one night, armed with a case of Red Bull, I decided to focus. Five hours passed. It was two a. m. when I was rewarded.

I blinked and when I looked down again, there was a man in a trenchcoat standing by the car of an octogenarian woman with blue hair. She had been there since 1:42. The man, with jet black hair, was over six feet tall and wore

sturdy work boots despite the heat. The lime green door across the street was open, the splash of color replaced by a black rectangular void. They were talking. No, that isn't right. He talked; she listened. The man leaned over, completely blocking my view of the old woman, and said something to her, opened his coat and showed her something.

By that time, I was hyperventilating. It was true, all of it was true. Old people were coming to the street behind my apartment building to die. Death lived in a townhouse with a lime green door across the street from me. My hands started to tingle and shake; my vision blurred. The man rose from her window and the woman looked up at him with a beatific smile. My tongue turned to parchment, my throat closed and I could feel my hair writhe.

The man turned toward me. I swore he burned a hole through the glass of my window and into my forehead with a pair of smoldering red eyes.

I closed all my blinds and got into bed.

You're not going to get me, I thought to myself, repeating the words in my head, until I passed out.

The next morning, I had a headache. I left my shades drawn. I wondered if I was having a nervous breakdown. Death was at my door. I wanted Raven to talk me down, but I couldn't remember her cell phone number. I considered getting the front desk to see if there was a doctor in the building. I thought about calling 9-1-1. Instead, I did nothing. I sat and stared straight ahead. I waited.

Time passed and it was two a. m. again and I didn't know if I had been awake or asleep, just that the covers were pulled up to my neck.

Three sharp raps, like gunshots, like popcorn. And again - bam, bam, bam. The reports bounced around the walls of my apartment like a superball until I didn't know where they had started. My front door? Is that what a scythe pounding on wood sounds like? And then the voices rose up from the street, growls and barks, angry, vengeful. I imagined splitting in two and simultaneously going to the window to look outside while also answering my door to let the hounds in. I did neither. Glass breaking, more snarling, a screech. The sheets flowed over my head, an inevitable tide pulling me under the waves. I started to count backwards from one hundred, reaching thirty-seven before I realized that it was again quiet and dark and lonely.

The next day, when I finally looked outside, I saw the post pounded into the earth in front of the lime green door, a simple sign hanging from it. FSBO. Fizz-bo. For Sale By Owner. The townhouse's front window was shattered and boarded over, sun reflecting off slivers of glass on the sidewalk. Another day, another sign. SOLD. And on the third day, the post was uprooted, leaving a gaping wound in the small patch of brownish grass.

After that, the old people disappeared completely.

I went back to work and told them I'd had mono. Or maybe that my grandmother had died. I'm not sure which lie I used that time.

A few weeks later, I was walking back to my apartment down Corcoran when I noticed an old man sitting in his car across the street, staring out the front windshield, waiting. I crossed over and knocked on his window. After a moment, he rolled it down and looked up at me expectantly. His face was mottled with liver spots and one side of his mouth drooped, possibly the result of a stroke. I thought I was helping him.

He's not here anymore, I said.

The old man did not understand.

He's not coming for you.

The old man started to nod.

I'm not waiting for him.

With that, he turned forward again, back to his own thoughts, away from the chaotic jumble of mine. As I walked toward my apartment, he rolled up his window.

When I got inside, I went to my window. His car was still there. The old man was gone. It took them two months to boot the abandoned car and another three to tow it. Less than a minute after the tow truck rumbled away, someone else took the parking spot. ¶

Josh Rathkamp

The Messenger

for John Espinoza

I think the bird that shit on your shoulder is not a messenger of God
like you said, but only a bird, a bird that chose the tree above us.
But, also as you said, what if the bird was racist?
It could have landed on that branch spotting a darker man.
If that is the case, the bird truly might have been
some kind of witness, sent from God knows where.
I'd have to think the opposite though.
I'd have to think that sometimes birds hide too
behind laughter. They must want. They must need to ride
a bike or drive 65 in a car without wind
smearing tears to their faces. The question is then
was it bliss or hate that the bird felt for you.
Was it a joke, the way we are all jokes to someone else as they talk
sweetly in bed? What difference John,
the way we get shit on ourselves?
It is bound to happen. We are bound to the earth
just as birds are bound to sky.
Sometimes what we think is soaring is actually
a hell of a lot of work.

VANISHING:1965

The rules you must follow for a successful vanishing are few. They must be internalized and never forgotten:

Plan ahead.

Do not explain your actions to anyone, however innocent.

Record and remember fictions.

Do not communicate with friends or relatives by U.S.
Mail or telephone.

Both before and after, maintain appearance of a calm, law-abiding citizen.

Do not reveal your history to new friends.

There have been instances when I have broken one or a combination of these rules and each time I have felt panic and loss of control. When I lost control, my body twitched and my nights filled with dreams of search, flight, prison. To calm myself, I smiled a lot. Occasionally I had to invent new fictions of surpassing pathos — an alcoholic mother — and then wait to discover the power of fiction.

One more rule: NEVER LIE TO THE CHILDREN. After you have vanished, they will hear you lie to others (birthdate, place of birth, explanations of father's whereabouts), but if they know the reasons for your lies they will know history and motive and can fit pieces into the puzzle. You are putting yourself in their power, but you've been there all along, haven't you?

To vanish. The word excites me. The idea is kin to reincarnation — to leave one realm and appear in another. Changing my hair color or facial features, or altering the looks of my children, even if possible, scarcely occurred to me. I knew I had an anonymous face, and time would swiftly change Louis and Emily. There was no blemish, scar, prominent mole on us that would cause anyone to take notice. No withered arm, wandering eye or hair-lip. We were ordinary, and quickly would join the most unexamined group in America — women raising children alone. Our sole worrying distinction was that the children were smart, either as a result of the trouble they'd seen or natural endowment, but I could hardly tell them to dumb-down for a while. Both seemed to be born competitive, wanting to be first and best, to know

the answers. With Louis, I gained six safe months by withholding him from kindergarten until he was willing to be called by his new name. Obliging, he flunked his pre-Kg test and I was told he needed time to mature. When asked to count five dots he answered 'green'; he said lemonade was 'very, very orangey'; he listed three vehicles with wheels - 'tricycles, cars, and ships.' I didn't tell his interrogators that he'd been in one school or another since he was two, could speak passable Italian, had crossed the Atlantic in a ship, had shouted at a judge in full court 'You're mean! I want my mommy!' and that his greatest gift was comedy, displayed long before he had good reason to duck adult guidance. I did not explain to these authorities. An authority is anyone who has, or will have, power over you. Learn how to spot them.

In contrast to Louis, who wasn't ready to be a hero, Emily entered second grade as Linda Lawrence, answered to that name although she'd had it only two weeks, and kept a careful mouth. When I was a child I admired Joan of Arc; when I was forty, I was awed and humbled by the bravery of my daughter, barely seven years old. Her solemn dignity made me seek mine, and yet I wondered in what direction the twig was being bent and whether a bonsai would grow in that place where I hoped for shimmering aspen.

To vanish. To pass suddenly from sight. Those left behind would not see me, they would receive no letters. No one could summon me to court, no warrant for my arrest could pass to my hand. Invisible children can't be taken from an invisible woman. In the second week, I walked barefoot beside the ocean, Louis lagging behind, squatting, poking a stick into seaweed pods, laughing at the pop, dragging a length of seaweed behind him, asking if he could take it home. We were tiny sculptures on sand. We walked up the lane into town. At a busy corner, inside a graffitied kiosk, I placed a call to my former school board chairwoman. Don't call again, the FBI has visited, your crime is now a felony, be well, be happy, we love you, don't call again, we don't like to lie. The dirty telephone booth and the anonymous gas station now seemed much too open, places where felons were watched. The cars, the gas pumps, the telephone had eyes. Louis, with his green and brown slimy sea-hair wrapped around his neck, was unmistakably 'the boy', the woman was wearing Guilt. I was huge in my pink T-shirt, the white of my cutoffs dazzled, competed with the sun. I took his hand, he pulled it away. We walked home slowly, my feet wanting to run but awaiting my command.

Planning obsessed me while I waited for the children to be sent to me for their month-long, every-other-summer visit. Christmas, one week in alternate years. For the first time in my life I had a relatively long-range goal. By nature, I was a perverse non-planner, amazed by those women who not only knew what the family would be eating two weeks in the future but had already shopped for the ingredients and never ran out of toilet paper. If becoming a criminal was my long-range goal, I knew I had to practice and this meant preparing my identity in advance. I needed to be sustained daily by a sense

that I was ethical and was acting in the best interests of the children, but I couldn't find a source for sustenance. I had to look up at the moon and ask for help.

While you are waiting for the moon's advice, here's what you must do. Collect all the paper props of your existence: Social Security card, driver's license, birth certificate, school records, transcripts. Know that you'll be trashing all these items, but put all this paper in a pile and select a new name. This decision may take several days or even weeks, but don't rush. Your name, because chosen, must continue to encourage you through hard times ahead, but avoid a name that would cause anyone to ask questions. Talk to yourself: "Oh Mrs. Blank, could I trouble you to make a payment on your doctor's bill?" When the name feels warm, adventurous, perhaps even romantic but respectable, select a birthdate and birth place. Name, birthdate, birthplace. Don't go exotic on birthplace, Choose a large metropolitan area like L.A. or NY. Select new birthdates for both yourself and your children. These birthdates should be as easy to remember as the real ones and should be in the same season of the year. Write all this on a piece of paper and memorize it. Then tear it up and stuff it at the bottom of someone else's garbage.

On a sunny day when you feel optimistic, drive at least fifty miles in any direction and post an application to the Social Security Administration with return address GENERAL DELIVERY at the post office in any nearby small town. If you're sure no one has followed you, present yourself at this town's motor vehicle office and start live lying. Say you're new in town and plan to stay but you don't have a driver's license, have never had one. Say your husband did all the driving but now you're divorced, gulp, and a cousin has been teaching you. In California a photo is required. You can wear a kerchief and look down at your feet at the last moment. Refuse a fingerprint, it is optional. The clerk will not be pleased, but don't explain or apologize. Just say you'd rather not. You'll have to give the same address of GENERAL DELIVERY. The clerk won't like that either, but don't explain.

Birth certificates, college records and transcripts are worthless but if you can't bear to part with them and are thinking you might learn forgery, bury them in the bottom of your suitcase. Amateur forgery is not a good idea; it can be detected by even the dullest of clerks. Professional forgery is expensive and risky, leading you into company you'd best be wise to avoid.

Keep in focus whatever moral purpose you've been able to construct. And if this collapses, as it will, console yourself by remembering that you are at war, that the father has sole custody of the children, that he kidnaps them and maligns you, that you birthed them, you've done no wrong except to leave him, that his quality time with his daughter is too intimate, he has an evil temper, and that leaving will mean a cessation of these troubles and is in the best interests of the children.

All of this is old news and its litany now is to give you courage for

surely the most desperate act of your life. When the voice inside your head bleats - "Oh, helpless lambs without a father!" tell yourself that millions of children are without fathers and in any case, it's never been proved that a father is necessary for balanced growth and something called maturity, and there's much evidence to the contrary. None of this will ease your pain but is useful to carry you forward. You knew that action would be difficult, and while you're waiting to vanish, remember the torture of enforced passivity, the shameful role of a discarded mother, the children's empty beds, your feet that have nowhere to go, not even to Safeway to buy Wheaties and milk, the teaching position you lost because you couldn't be there and in court at the same time, the money you owe lawyers. Walk in maudlin shadow only long enough to stiffen your back.

If you have made your decision to vanish well in advance of actual possibility, as I did, you will have time to get strong before the children's summer or Christmas visit. Strength requires money and health. Fear will make your food back up but clean the toilet and scrub it with Lysol. Try to re-gain the weight you've lost in court battles. I took on survey and clerical jobs, and a summer Headstart classroom. I was, after all, a teacher, though much tattered. Still, a prepared teaching environment for those welfare children was better than neglect and street fighting. They would never know a perfect summer.

When my children stumbled off the plane after an eight-month absence from me, they were cranky crosspatches, weary of travel and adult emotion. My daughter was shy, my son did not recognize me. Their companions for that summer were four-year-old black children of similar dispositions. Emily helped in my classroom but by the end of the first week defected to an adjoining calmer room. My unrest seemed to pollute the air. One little boy sat at his table all morning, did not touch the colorful blocks set before him, and each time the wall clock moved forward a minute, he startled at the sound and said: "Theh it go agin," his eyes, popping wide.

But you have more important things to do than worry about your career ,if you have one. Getting money, cash for the road. You must realize early, months in advance, that money will be needed for food, shelter, transportation, and child care until you can find a job. Forget Welfare and Aid to Dependent Children. You will not be able to tap public funds. Social workers ask questions and pursue answers: Where is your husband? Why is he not helping? Your birth certificate? The children's birth certificates? There are no fictional responses that will suffice. Not having a paper record tells them you are not real, you are probably guilty of something. If you do not have months in which to gather cash, do not vanish. Wait until the next opportunity.

If you have three or four months, stop paying all bills except rent and utilities. Make a bill file. As the envelopes turn pink, then red, and the file

gets hot, chuck the whole mess into the garbage can and start over with a new file folder. You may have been the fastest bill payer in the United States and the habit of being financially responsible may be tough to break. There's something wondrously moral about paying what you owe. You feel clean and virtuous, without sin. It may help to lecture to yourself in the morning shower. Use pompous terms like Higher Cause, Best Interest etc., and when you get desperate—Some Day I'll Pay Them Back. Most of my unpaid bills were from lawyers, some of whom were still tidying up our three-year, two-state, transcontinental custody case. When they pressed for payment I tried to be pleasant and thank them for their services but thought to myself, "If I had paid you well, you'd have won the case." Compared to my husband's, my earning power was small, and every cent went to lawyers or for transportation from one state to another, or for personal maintenance, food and shelter. I could borrow small sums from relatives but could not borrow from institutions. I had no credit. I had been a wife and mother.

You don't have to cringe and whimper. You can work double time, sixteen hours a day. Typing, survey work, addressing envelopes, driving a newspaper-distribution van, a school bus, waitressing, tutoring, drudging in a nursing home. Save every cent. Borrow more from relatives, any amount. My parents, that last summer, were anxious about the \$3,000 bond they had paid to guaranty the children's return. They were bitter, tired of paying, weary of childcare, and weren't at all sure they even liked me. I was a granite boulder on their heads. I was a leak in their life savings. If you can wangle a loan from a credit union, do so. Be bold and if all goes as planned, you won't have to pay back.

Take time to re-examine your decision, your reasons for flight. Is HE truly a villain? Did he abuse, batter, frighten, turn the children against you? Did you exaggerate? Provoke? Have you skills, training, brains, courage sufficient to provide for your children? Do you harbor a hope that you'll find another supporter-husband, live-in lover in L.A., N.Y., or S.F.? If "don't know" pops into your mouth as answer to any of these questions, abandon plans and stay where you are.

* * *

YOU WILL HAVE NOTICED THAT in the preparatory stage you've begun lying. There will be a lot more lying in your future. You may remember that I said NEVER LIE TO THE CHILDREN. There is, however, a before and an after. While you are still in the life you are leaving, the Before, you will be acting a role. You are probably encouraging the children to talk on the phone to their father, you are discussing with him and with the children their return to his custody, you may even be planning with your lawyer a future court date. The children will ask questions. "Why can't we live with you, Mommy?" Because the judge says you can't. "Will you visit us when we go back to Father?" The judge will not allow that, but I'll write letters to you. Your mother says,

"You're not planning anything stupid, are you?" No. Your sister says, "It's a damn shame. You'll let me know if I can help?" Yes. Thanks. I'm fine. I'm adjusting. Someone offers you a job for two months hence when you hope you'll be long gone. You accept. You sign a contract and keep in touch. You are practicing the art of lying.

You are also watching for signs that you are being tailed or tapped. If you have an accomplice, don't meet him or her for lunch or dinner and certainly not in your residence, and, don't talk on the phone or write notes. Potential accomplices seem to pop up like the first crocuses through the melting snow, and not because you have solicited help. You are a visible Need, a bleeding victim, not quite dead. They offer transcripts, a dead cousin's diploma, advice, the use of a neutral automobile to get you to any destination. You shake your head and walk away. Before you accept any of these aids you must make sure your helper is not acting out of pity. He or she must demonstrate quiet pleasure in confounding authorities, in getting away with sabotaging society's legal system, and an anticipatory delight in lying to the FBI. These qualifications are more enduring than personal affection or sympathy with the victim. Don't confide details of Plan to ANYONE.

Nowadays, forty years on, there is something new you must weave into your thoughts. Organizations with names like Vanished Children's Alliance or Missing Children's Network, are forming to retrieve children. No distinction is made, except in their files, between children who have been scattered by custody battles and those whose disappearance cannot be explained and whose mother and father keep a mute vigil over an empty bedroom. The public is an interested national posse that feels comforted by supermarket bags bearing tragic statistics, pictures on graffitied subway walls, airline terminal benches. I cannot make this less serious than it is. No citizen or child can hide from TV. Be cautious.

Do not enter your child at mid-term in a public school. Tell a good story, elongate your neck until your head touches the clouds, let their hair grow, avoid baby-sitters, and, with a smile, walk away from neighbors. Time will pass and the faces on the bags will change. There are so many missing children. Soon the public's pirouette into altruism will change into a more stately dance and will begin to concentrate on children whose disappearance cannot be explained by "her father took her.." Women will begin to notice that in the news stories about children who have been found as a result of a TV picture, an unseemly number of distraught mothers are dragged back to face the judge. They will learn that 70% of the fathers who ask for custody get it, and they will begin to ask why. In the meantime you can't constantly act as though you are hiding. It's not good for the children. You might as well walk proudly and make sure the child takes your hand when you cross a busy street.

YOU MUST DECIDE WHERE YOU ARE GOING. Will it be a warmer place or have you chosen North Dakota on the assumption that people are too busy with the weather up there to notice irregularity? My choice was Tucson, a mistake, and one I had sense enough to rectify after two weeks. 107 degrees. No public kindergartens. You cannot just take off and hope for the best. You may like ocean and feel safe in nature, but wherever you go, you will be entering a community and you must seek at the least, an indifferent population, at best, an economically prospering hive that will deliver you a means of support. A place, in short, that is paving the land with gas stations on four corners, where flower acreage is yielding to supermarkets, where condos get permits on prime land and the Chamber of Commerce building is two minutes from the freeway.

The best way to find out about a place is to ask those who have been there, but this method of research is not safe for one who wishes to vanish. You are playing the role of resigned victim and you can't strike up conversations about Spokane or Butte without arousing suspicion. What's left? Books? It is not safe to go carelessly to a library or bookstore. You must assume your actions are being observed. If this sounds like paranoia, sometimes the tiger is a real tiger and in court I've heard my most innocent remarks relayed, with innuendo, into the ears of an impatient judge.

If you use a library, don't check out a travel book. Find a private place for reading and when you've collected a few books, do your reading swiftly. Before you leave, put the travel books back on the shelves, out of order. If you browse at a bookstore, don't idle at the travel section. Remove the book that interests you and read it in the poetry corner. This skulking is good practice and should not depress you. You're training your mind and body to act with caution and you're learning to divorce your demeanor from the contents of your mind. You are becoming an actress, and high time! Remember the time so long ago when you naively believed the state could not take from you the children who had split your body and sucked milk from your breasts? Remember the office where you said this, your eyes wide and brimming with tears? What a ridiculous, pathetic, stupid, ignorant, whining, weak lump you were! Notice how poised, serene and self-confident you appear now as you step down the library stairs, the knowledge in your head, no notes left behind or in your purse. You may even be sassy enough to check out two books on London and pause beside your car to read a few pages. If you can't as yet wholeheartedly love this new woman, try at least to admire her art.

With your destination to guide you, you are now ready to select those items you want to accompany you on your journey. You are not going to throw clothes into boxes at the last moment, struggle with them to the getaway car with children crying, asking questions. You are going to begin making choices

weeks in advance, and your imperatives will be Need and Minimum. Need can stretch a bit to include items of beauty with no function (a hand-carved angel, a tiny Buddha, a throw of red wool with interwoven golden thread) or pictures of the children, parents, or objects of psychological importance to your hostages — a teddybear, a blanket. You should, however, keep your mind on the place beyond and try to picture yourself going in and out, wearing those pants or that dress, walking in those shoes, the children inconspicuously dressed in J.C. Penney clothes. Forget your wedding china, your great aunt's pettipointed footstool, the brass sherry decanter that contains a music box in its base. *Skaters' Waltz*.

I kept three paper cartons on the top shelf of my bedroom closet. They were labeled in black magic marker ink 'Household,' 'Children,' and 'Self' and beneath each label I printed O.P. No snoop could possibly guess that O.P. meant Operation Powder. Each time I climbed onto a chair to place a garment or object in one of the three boxes, my knees turned into cottage cheese, my hands trembled, my throat swelled and I felt as though I were collecting the effects of people who had just died. This was always late at night in my court-allowed one summer month, when the children were asleep. One night the chair tipped me into a heap on the floor and the chair became omen, forecasting slippage and chance collapse of all plan.

And I want you to know that there is a lie in what I write, in the larky tone and jaunty, bold recall. I was not the gay adventurer I wanted to be. I was ill with fear, demented, during all those days of preparation. I wasn't sure there was enough clay left to shape me into a new woman.

The children and I left town in a borrowed car at the end of August 1965. I turned the radio dial to all stations as we covered the miles. Each station gave out news of the Watts Riot in L.A. There was no news of a vanishing woman. ¶

Don Welch

The Old Botanist

After the storm,
in his hailed-out greenhouse,
he put on water music,

glissandos for the crushed hands
of the ferns. Then, getting up,
he wandered through the ruins,

humming notes so soft
they were like the tears of moss
or the breaths of crucified alyssum.

All afternoon he wandered
among the pots and flats,
trying to bring back

whole instruments of plants,
until near evening
he heard the cusp of one green sound,

an inclination of new music
over the raw and angry ground.

Soutien-Gorge

In the cargo container out of Indonesia
it was still impersonal: two eyes, two hooks

two cups, a late-comer borrowing its language.
On the way from Jakarta it was still pretty:

half-moons stitched into lavender nylon,
smaller than *hers*, though I am

not supposed to talk about it, am supposed
to sew fasteners to my lips, to forget

how often the fricatives, the sibilants,
the liquids of her name have burst

that flimsy dam behind your throat.

THE EXPERIMENT

“How does a newness come into the world? How is it born? Of what fusions, translations, conjoinings is it made? How does it survive, extreme and dangerous as it is? What compromises, what deals, what betrayals of its secret nature must it make to stave off the wrecking crew, the exterminating angel, the guillotine? Is birth always a fall? Do angels have wings?”

- Salman Rushdie -

Jenny Hanning

Under Sun, Under Stars

THE USS NARWHAL, 1967

The metal womb knows nothing about submarines, but that is how she thinks of herself—a submarine—except she is not submerged and moves through humanity, not water, so the name is wrong—sub, and marine—but that is how she sees herself—a sleek metal dart parting an unimaginable vastness, and housed inside her a hundred little terrified heartbeats longing to surface.

The metal womb does not have eyes, but if she did, after she closed them, and in the filmy moments before sleep takes hold, she would see fireflies blinking over the tall grass in a field. In her dreams (she does dream) the womb holds a jar of bottled fireflies in her makeshift hands. The glass vibrates—the tremble—of life contained. Inside her human children grow, and the womb does not know that is them, these future humans, who see the fireflies. She is drawing her dreams from the wispy fragments of theirs'. The comparisons that she makes are theirs' too—they are the trapped crew, the collected insects. Dreaming she sees their light blinking in the round windows of the submarine—of her metal womb—and waking puts a thumb over the flattened circle of her belly button—a hatch into the holding tank—wishing it were a window so that she could see the children inside.

The children are panicking, turning and tangling in the fleshy rope of their umbilical cords. Some have pulled loose, and finding themselves detached from their placentas, huddle on the floor, hungry and confused.

THE SPORT OF KINGS

It wiped out horses first. Red Bag: when the foal is delivered prematurely, undeveloped, and overdeveloped—a mutant of a horse—rather than clear fluid the amnion is full of blood. Red Bag births were quick and awful, the mare cleaving as the front legs emerged, the foal soft as soap, giving way under the hands that tried to lift it. Panda Bears and yellow salamanders. Slowly the living things died off as must happen when no more are born—or rather—when all are born dead. Sometimes people noticed and others they didn't. The end of the blue bottle fly wasn't recorded for years.

The womb has vague memories of these things, a fluctuating line of history, cellular memory drawn from the fetuses she carries. They absorb from her, and she from them. These are children who will have the uncouth habit of spitting from the sides of their mouths, always tasting blood on their tongues, born as they were from a giant tank lined with copper.

THE UNEXPECTED

A giant metal womb should have no consciousness of its own, but if we've learned anything at all from all that has happened, it is that evolution is avoidable only by extinction, so it is not far fetched that a giant metal womb might after a hundred years of silence hear its own thoughts, might have at some unknown point begun to think, might come to understand—when the children are extracted—what it is to be alone, left only with the sloshing of the fermenting amniotic fluids and the memories (memories of them, and memories left by them) of the children, to stand against the insanity of solitude.

FAITH

There are things too exquisite to be captured in words, and events that demand a person believe without thinking, without consideration of anything, but hope—arguably the last valid thing we have.

Bioluminescence: the emission of visible light by living organisms such as the firefly. The noun—bioluminescence is a thing in-of-itself, not a descriptive—originates from the Greek, *bios*, meaning living, and *lumen*, meaning light: Living light. *Living light*.

When a candle proved to consume too rapidly the air supply in the first combat submarine Benjamin Franklin suggested the use of bioluminescent foxfire, a fungus, a glowing blue mold of the *armillaria* family to light the interior. And it worked.

THE UNEXPECTED

So a metal womb, little more than a giant tank and high-end filtration system, begins to hear her own voice. Five years, five hundred children drawn walking upright from her opened cavity, and she begins to develop a sense of history, of cycles, of *life*. She builds herself a set of arms and with the arms she builds herself legs and then with the legs she flees the field where she has always been, where she has spent all her existence incubating children under the sun and stars.

SOME FACTS ABOUT HUMAN BIRTH

If the placenta does not slide free, (third stage of the birthing process, a series of lighter contractions taking anywhere from ten to forty-five minutes) one last push and then the sack of meaty nutrients slipping out with the rest of the umbilical cord—if that doesn't happen—then a doctor or whomever might take the cord in both hands and began to yank, hoping to wrench it free, and if it does not loosen then the doctor, or whomever, might slide an arm into the woman's body, as deep as the arm will go to grip the placenta itself. Scarring, commonly caused by premature labor, or any other odd number of other things, can fuse the placenta to the uterine wall, and the

doctor or whomever, hoping to spare the woman the further trauma of surgery or death, might start ripping purple bloody handfuls free, removing the placenta one fistful at a time, sweeping a hand back and forth like a knife in the jar of peanut butter, hunting out the last smear.

ASSISTED BIRTH IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Baboons deliver their own young. Evolution has positioned the infant to emerge face up so that the mother may peel away the amniotic sack and look into her child's eyes as she draws it from her body.

It was a necessity that human children were born underdeveloped, and even in that fragile polliwog state were too large, were not designed for birth. They jammed, a hundred different ways, catching, grinding, ripping their mother's flesh, and sometimes to get them out, get them born—the doctors, the midwives, the whoever the unfortunate birth assistant was, would have to reach up inside and *fiddle*—reposition, shifting, and posing—square peg, round hole—and sometimes when being elbow deep in a woman *pulling* while shoving down on her stomach with a second hand wasn't enough someone would have to part the mother, dig inside her open body, feel out the knotted bundle of child and start to damage it, snapping clavicles, dislocating minuscule shoulders, working the child into something small enough, bent enough, to pull free.

Red Bag Infants shredded. The aftermath of a Red Bag birth was like the evening at a barbeque joint where eating with fingers is encouraged. Sauce on everything, gnawed bones, wads of crumpled paper, little hills of meat.

SCIENTIFIC THEORY

Perhaps you have heard of the theory of cellular memory—events recorded by flesh. There was that woman, Penny Dunleavy, who on the cusp of her death received a second life, the heart of a nineteen year old boy killed in a motorcycle crash. He was on a food run, picking up lunch for the construction crew he was working for that summer. Home from college, a sweet kid who always ordered the grill cheese on sourdough, and when Ms. Dunleavy woke, reborn like a cat, all she wanted was to see her daughter and a grilled cheese on sourdough.

She worked the talk show circuit with a picture of the boy on a giant screen behind her chair. Some were touched, others put off. There are scientists who will argue Ms. Dunleavy's story is built of coincidence, and others who will call it proof.

The body knows things. The heart beating in Ms. Dunleavy's chest, circulating her blood to the furthest tips of her tippy-toes, belongs to a nineteen year old boy, and while Ms. Dunleavy has embraced this heart as her own, it is not an organ. It is a memoir, the story of another, seeping into her with each clench of muscle, each sigh of blood.

So we might assume that as the children developed from larval to limbed the great metal womb absorbed from them the history imprinted in their clever cells.

THE TRAGEDY OF BIPEDALISM

It cannot be stressed enough: the evolution of the human has left the female of its specie physically ill equipped for birth. There are numerous factors that contribute to the somewhat accurate comparison of pushing a watermelon through a lemon. Foremost among them, fetal head size compared to maternal pelvic breadth—a side effect of bipedalism—which requires legs to be closely set allowing for a noble upright stride, but creating a small pelvic opening, much too small to comfortably pass the massive cranium of a human infant.

A further tragedy of bipedalism: human babies are unable to grip to their mothers. Their feet, unlike those of the rhesus or Andean titi monkey, are not able to grasp, so it often happened, as mothers fled from the forces of George A. Custer, or the advancing Alien Horde, or had to rapidly rise and dart down the stairs at Starbucks to keep their car from being towed, that the baby in their arms might somehow slip, and unable to hold on itself the child tumbled through the air impacting with the ground.

HOW QUICKLY WE FORGET

This is the age of the metal womb. Mothers are accustomed to children developed enough to wipe their own bottoms, to make their own Kool Aid, pour without spilling, wash a dish, tie their shoes. Survive the daily trials of life.

Now think of the human infant, minutes old and slicked with mucus. A newborn cannot step into the shower and wash itself clean. It must be assisted with everything, even its first breath. Think of the mother faced with this tiny life, with this overwhelming helplessness and dependency. Six pounds of living meat dropped in her lap and now people look at her and say, *Make this work*.

Have you ever heard a baby cry? They will howl, wail, scream, until their faces discolor. Their ridiculously little hands tighten in fists and they flail like they are in agony. Screaming. Screaming. Screaming. There are obvious signs of distress to check for: does the baby need a change? No. Is the baby hungry? It just ate. What? What then? Eager to *make it work* the mother takes the child in her arms pacing the floor and lulling. The baby screams and screams. The pitch is murderous. Pain is growing behind the mother's eyes. The baby is a struggling uncoordinated weight in her arms. She begins to worry. Is the baby sick? All the screaming has turned the baby hot and red and damp. The mother is afraid to call the doctor. He'll laugh at her, calling her a new mother dismissively. She is afraid to use the rectal thermometer.

She read in a book on babies that it sometimes makes them poop. She is terrified. Still the baby is screaming. Sweat is pooling in the mother's bra. The baby screams and thumps against her chest. How is it helpless when it so strong? The mother is afraid of holding it too tightly, but the baby twists in her arms. The mother is afraid of dropping it. She thinks about putting it down, but can't. She can't *walk away* from her crying child. She begins to wonder, does this baby hate me? Is this baby evil? Why won't it shut-up? Why won't it shut-up? Why *the fuck* won't it shut up?

ADAPTATION

With no other choice they've become cannibals. The placentas are long gone, and in their twentieth year enutero the grown human fetuses in the metal womb are adapting. Rather than kill and eat one another they've begun to breed and feed off their young. They deal the babies out limb by limb, and when the mothers die of hemorrhage or pleural fever they feast, and the next infant born is spared. Civilizations are built, gods are created on such foundations.

FEAR BASED RESPONSES

For a time the scientists believe the womb was stolen. The government has various organizations on the look-out, waiting for the children who were growing inside to appear on the black market, or be offered up as bargaining chips in some sort of sinister alien deal.

There are sightings. Denial is maintained as long as is possible. The scientists are given a tape—allegedly of the womb—wading in the mild waters off Prince Edward Island. For weeks they try to prove it fake, but a battery of test call the tape genuine. Some scientist weep, others get drunk, one goes out to her car, takes the gun from her glove box and shoots herself in the head.

Fueled by nightmarish visions of a bionic uprising the project is terminated. With the exception of the renegade—still missing—all the metal wombs are recycled. Children are reunited with their surrogate mothers as they flip pennies or buy a six-pack of Diet Coke.

Human are forced to return to the standard method of birth, but of course, evolution cannot be reversed.

There are no records. The results from that first year—the return to natural birth—were, they say, too horrifying to document.

USS NARWHAL, 1967

The hunt continues for the metal womb. There is still hope that it will be found, that they may determine its defects, restart the project, and save humanity. But if they found the womb, saw what grew inside it, they would gladly give up. They would embrace the fate of the blue bottle fly. Death—extinction—better than survival and the risk of becoming.

PHILOSOPHY 1301, TUESDAY/FRIDAY 8:00a.m.—10:00a.m.

A hundred years ago there was a butcher near your home, and you knew his name. He knew you like an onion chopped into your ground chuck. He saved the cow tongue for your mother. When you came in he talked with you about the ribbons of the fat through the meat, your children, the kittens his cat delivered in the china hutch, and told you, Oh tell your mother I've got a nice beef tongue for her, or maybe he gave it to you wrapped in white paper and added it to a running tab. He wiped his pink-blooded hand over his apron before patting you on the hand. Have a good day, now, he says. And you would say, Thanks, Douglas. You do the same.

It is possible to buy bacon pre-cooked. It is nested in little circles, spiraled like a snail, perfectly sized to fit on an onion roll or English muffin. You see, we live in a time when even our bacon is *convenient*.

Maybe there was never any Red Bag at all.

Why go through all that trouble—the impregnation is the best part, right?—after that, why not let it be handled by another? The morning sickness, the weight gain, the bloating. All that *discomfort*. Why risk stretch marks, cracked nipples, pendulous breasts, a loose vagina, and why deal with all the hassle of a baby with its *needs* when it isn't entirely *necessary*?

It's a little suspicious— don't you think? They tell us there are no records, because it was just too horrible. But haven't we always embraced disaster? Don't humans just love a catastrophe? We always want to know moremoremore. How many stab wounds? How long was she chained in the basement? How many times did he rape her? What foreign objects did he employ? How long did she suffer? Is there *video*? We want to know everything.

What really happened?

Is it possible that we are dying, because we have forgotten—at the most basic levels—how to live?

THE CROCODILE

The womb crouches in swamp water with crocodiles—the escapees of evolution— curved around her oxidized sides. Her dreams are terrible. She does not have eyes, but she dreams of darkness, and if she could gag, she would, because the air that is filtered out from her cavity is heavy with the smell of blood. The womb is turning insane now (as witnesses and survivors have a tendency to do), absorbing animal chaos from the things that live inside her. She wishes she could return to nothingness. She would give anything to have never heard her own thoughts, to have never *known*.

COULD GOD MAKE A ROCK SO BIG

One day when her wear and despair have gone unchecked too long, will she crumble? Will she break open, releasing her progeny into what remains of the world? And when they build the great bloody altars of their

civilization—when they rip the arm of an infant from the socket and suck at the smooth ball of bone will they do it as an act of worship—to her—their mother—their creator. **F**

—Contributors' Notes—

John M. Anderson divides his time between Boston, Massachusetts, and Cripple Creek, Colorado. His chapbook, *Dictionary Quilt* is forthcoming from Pudding House Press.

Tim Bass teaches in the Department of Creative Writing at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, where he received an MFA in creative nonfiction. His work has appeared in *Small Spiral Notebook* and *The Oklahoma Review*.

Curtis Bauer's recent publications include *The Cortland Review*, *Fulcrum*, *From the Fishhouse* (<http://www.fishhouse.org/>) and *The Ashville Poetry Review*. His first poetry collection, *Fence Line*, published by BkMk Press in 2004, won the John Ciardi Poetry Prize. He is the publisher of Q Ave Press chapbooks, and he currently lives in Spain.

Joseph J. Capista lives in Baltimore, Maryland, where he teaches English in a private high school. In the summer of 2006 he studied Yeats at the National University of Ireland, Galway, through the National Endowment for the Humanities. His work has also appeared in *The Sow's Ear Poetry Review*, *The Texas Observer*, and is slated for publication in *RUNES* and *RATTLE*. Raised on the Eastern Shore of Maryland,

Catherine Carter now directs the English Education program at Western Carolina University. Her first book, *The Memory of Gills*, appeared from LSU Press in August 2006; her work has also appeared in *Poetry*, *Sulphur River Literary Review*, and *Cider Press Review*, among others, and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, a Pulitzer, and a National Book Award.

Canadian artist **Robert Carter** is an award-winning illustrator. He combines a strong foundation in portraiture with a unique sense of visual and conceptual problem solving to create his striking, vibrant and textured illustrations and portraits. A selection of Robert's work can be seen at personal portfolio website www.crackedhat.com Robert now lives and works in Baden, Ontario Canada.

Matthew Deshe Cashion is the author of a novel, *How the Sun Shines on Noise* (Livingston Press). Other work has appeared in such places as *The Sun*, *The Asheville Poetry Review*, *Hawaii Review*, *Wind*, and *Wisconsin Review*. He lives with his wife in La Crosse, Wisconsin, and teaches Creative Writing and Literature at the University of Wisconsin—La Crosse.

John Findura received his BA from The William Paterson University of New Jersey and his MFA from The New School. His poetry and criticism have ap-

peared or are forthcoming in various journals including *Mid-American Review*, *Verse*, *Half Drunk Muse* and *GlitterPony*. He was born and teaches in Paterson, New Jersey and resides nearby with his wife, their puppy, a fish, and a charm of finches.

Kerri French is a native of North Carolina and has studied at UNC-Chapel Hill, UNC-Greensboro, and Dublin City University. Her poetry is regularly featured on Sirius Satellite Radio and has recently appeared in *The Blotter*. She lives in Boston and teaches in the English Department at Mount Ida College in Newton, MA.

William Giraldi's stories and essays have appeared recently in *Tin House*, *The Believer*, *Shenandoah*, *Witness*, *Mississippi Review*, *Other Voices*, and *Fiction*. He's fiction editor for AGNI at Boston University, where he teaches writing and literature.

Angela Autry Gorden's work has recently appeared in *Columbia: A Journal of Literature Art*. She completed an MFA at the University of Iowa and is currently writing a memoir, *The Way People Watch Mercury*.

Jenny Hanning was born in 1983. She grew up in Maine, but currently lives in Austin, Texas. Her work has appeared in *Mudfish* and *Pebble Lake Review*.

Alan Harawitz is a retired New York City secondary school teacher. He currently lives in Brooklyn, New York but has recently purchased a home just outside of Portland, Maine. Maine has long been his home away from home and he's looking forward to living there on a more permanent basis.

Virginia M. Heatter is a co-founding editor of *The New Hampshire Review*. Her work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *Poetry Daily*, *Cranky*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and *American Literary Review*.

Robert Herschbach lives in Maryland with his wife and two children, and works as an editor. His poems have appeared recently in *The Cafe Review*, *The Louisville Review* and *Southern Poetry Review*, and are forthcoming in *Natural Bridge* and *Fine Madness*.

David Kirby teaches English at Florida State University. His next two books will be *The House on Boulevard St.: New and Selected Poems* and *Ultra-Talk*, a collection of essays. See www.davidkirby.com for more.

Michael Landweber lives in Washington, DC with his wife and two kids. He has been published in the *Potomac Review* and has a story forthcoming in *The MacGuffin*. He also writes screenplays with a partner in L.A.

Candida Lawrence lives in Mill Valley and San Francisco with her dog Milo.

She has published in *Missouri Review*, *Chattahoochee Review*, *American Short Fiction*, *The Ohio Journal*, *Sonora Review*, *Passages North*, *Soundings East*, and various anthologies. Perhaps her most notorious accomplishment was to create new identities for herself and her two young children and escape detection for twenty years. The details of this story are found in her memoirs, *Reeling and Writhing*, *Change of Circumstance*, and *...Fear Itself*.

Brian Maxwell attends the University of North Dakota, where he is pursuing his PhD. He is a devout Cubs fan, and loves the Atlantic Ocean.

In her life, **Tessa Mellas** has been able to land a double salchow on figure skates, to spin a cartwheel with no hands, to play Mozart's Concerto No. 1 in G Major from memory, and to swim a 100 butterfly in the pool. Now, she writes stories, teaches students to use relative clauses properly, and occasionally gets back on the ice to give those doubles another try.

Mitchell Metz is widely published. Most recently, his work has appeared in *Hiram Poetry Review*, *Roanoke Review*, *Redivider*, and *South Carolina Review*. He is currently a Pushcart Nominee.

Mihaela Moscaliuc's articles have appeared or are forthcoming in *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal and History of the Literary Cultures in East-Central Europe*, *Interculturality and Translation*, and *the History of the Literary Cultures in East-Central Europe*. Other publications include: book reviews and essays in *Marlboro Review*, *TriQuarterly Review*, *Western Folklore*, and *Review Revue*; poems in *Great River Review*, *Entelechy International*, *Near East Review*, and *The English Record*; co-translations of Romanian poetry in *Arts & Letters*, *Mississippi Review*, *Connecticut Review*, *Mid-American Review*; and elsewhere. I am the co-translator (with Michael Waters) of *Death Searches for You a Second Time* by Carmelia Leonte (Red Dragonfly Press, 2003).

Josh Rathkamp's first book of poems, *Simple Impossibilities*, will be published by Ausable Press in September of 2007. His work is forthcoming or has recently appeared in numerous literary journals including *Meridian*, *Indiana Review*, *Passages North* and *Rosebud*. He teaches at Arizona State University.

Jonathan Ritz's stories and essays have appeared in *Cimarron Review*, *American Literary Review*, *Passages North*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and have received three Pushcart Prize nominations. He lives in Pittsburgh, PA and teaches writing at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown.

Laurie Soslow is a 1998 graduate of the Boston University Creative Writing Program. She has spent most of the last eight years providing IT and management consulting services to nonprofit organizations. Laurie's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Plainsongs*, *Coconut*, *Mad Poets Review*, *Eclectica*, *Boxcar Poetry Review*, and *HiNgE*. Laurie resides in Philadelphia with her husband

and two cats.

Natasha Trethewey is the author of three collections of poetry. Her work can be found in *The Best American Poetry* 2003 and 2000, and in journals such as *Agni*, *American Poetry Review*, *Callaloo*, *Gettysburg Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *New England Review*, and *The Southern Review*, among others. She currently resides in Atlanta, Georgia where she teaches at Emory University.

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Anthony Varallo's short story collection, *This Day in History*, won the 2005 John Simmons Short Fiction Award, published by the University of Iowa Press. His stories have appeared in *Epoch*, *Story Quarterly*, *Shenandoah*, *Boulevard*, *Harvard Review*, and elsewhere, and have received an NEA Fellowship in Literature. Currently he is an assistant professor of English at the College of Charleston.

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