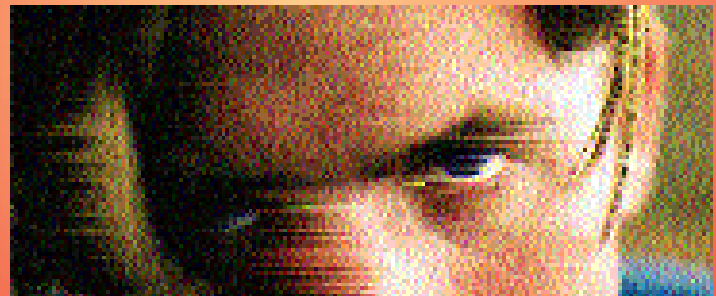


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children *churches* & daddies

the non-religious, non-family oriented literary and art magazine



volume 56



edit
editorial

This issue of c.c. and d. has a good mix of poetry, prose & artwork. Many past issues have been poetry intensive with a token story. Or maybe we would dedicate an issue to prose alone. But these future issues have a good mix. I hope you enjoy the variety. I know I do.

Janet Kuypers

think globally
act locally
change personally



children, churches & daddies

the non-religious, non-family
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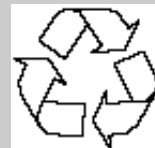
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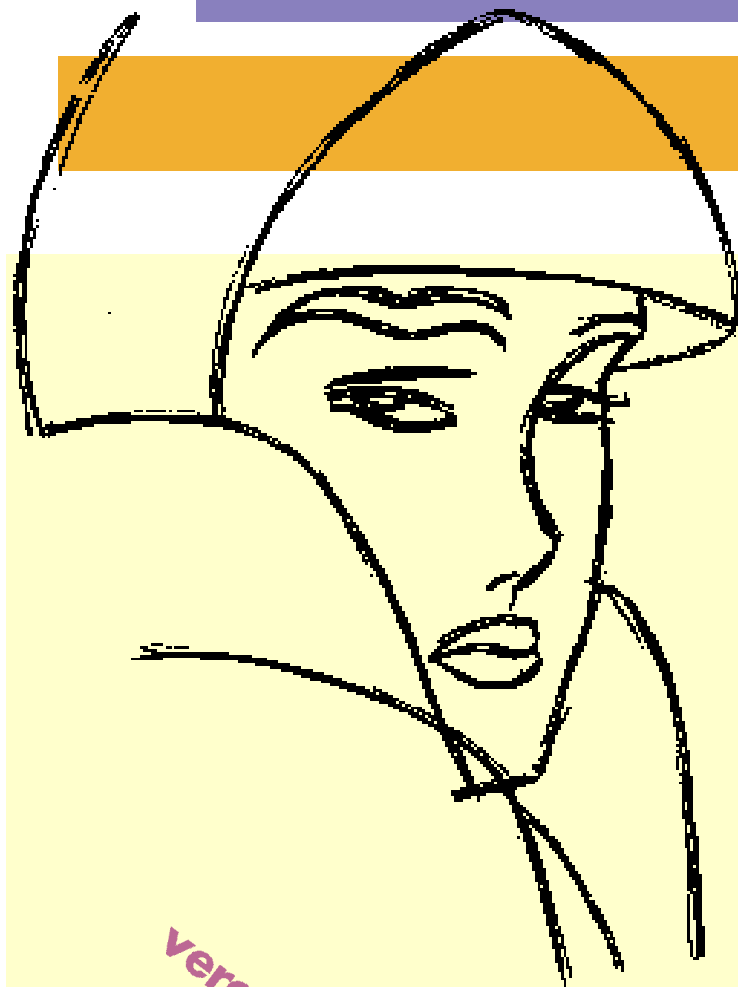
publishers of
children, churches & daddies
reverb
aaa poetry
the burning
god eyes
poetry sampler
poetry boxes
the annual poetry wall calendar
down in the dirt
mom's favorite vase newsletters

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and geez,
recycle this.
do i have
to tell you
everything?





veronica archer



hot balls

I'm curious if you have the alley
that's compatible with my balls
to up my score

as you sit
with ebony eyes
hardened in taunting stare
as my resined hand
clenches in anticipation
to approach your oaken line
with these red hot orbs
fixed to strike

I'm tensed

can you take me on
even if it's a split?

poetry by
paul weinman

lustful

the sight of you
the soft flesh swells
press at my skin
swells into my shapes
the pulse throbs
with its surrounding
its ebbing to mold
with my form
pushing through the rind
surging over muscles
sliding past fat
stroking sinews
to seep within bones
and yet I hardened
as if a skewer
penetrating flesh
writhing in wrap
of that injection
that splits the flesh
deeper with strokes
which swell and ebb
swell and ebb
until transfixion

Johnny's SKS

SKS spoke flame
gloved hands inserted
another stripper clip
SKS spoke more
thin wisp of smoke
trailed from the red
and white light plane
SKS was found
in the brush
with the fingerprints
of one of the victims

Larry Blazek

last night

She carved her initials in my left forearm
you can still see the scars
we drank a bottle of wine
and, when we were done
she hiked up her dress and sat on my chest
flicked open her purse knife and cut a W C
wincing with each stroke
I sighed
my eyes welling up at the sting
I felt good
I felt alive
I loved her right then.

christopher tm

UNDER THE TRAIN TRACKS, UNDER THE BRIDGE UNDER THE TRAIN TRACKS

It'll rattle
when the train goes
over
and some nights
it'll look
like the stars
are shaking
like your hands,
like the night
your hands
were in my pockets
you'll remember.

c.c. russel

ANNA MARIE

A Fair Young Maiden Lived By The Sea.
And What A Beautiful Girl Was She.
With Long Flowing Hair And Skin Of Fair.
She Answered To The Name Of Anna Marie.

Walking Her Beach, She Saw On The Sand,
The Pitiful Sight Of A Dying Young Man.
Chilled, And Very ill, She Saw This Man To Be
He Was Lost And Tossed, There By The Sea.

She Gave Him Comfort And First Aid,
And All The Offers Of A Beautiful Maid.
Annie Marie Had Now Found Her Man.
Hand And Hand They Walked In The Sand.

One Day In Sadness, He Would Come Say
With Great Sorrow, I Must Leave This Day.
It Has Been So Nice To Be Here With You.
But To My Heart And Self I Must Be True

I Will Now Return To My Home And My Life.
For There Awaits Me Is My Lovely Wife.
Then Anna Marie Took Her Knife
And Deep In His Chest, It Took His Life.

Her Heart Was Filled With Foreboding Doom,
As Hastily She Left Him Dead In The Room.
Silently She Walked Into The Darken Sea
That Took The Life
Of Beautiful Anna Marie.

Paul L. Glaze

a slow knowledge

learn
where to penetrate

how fast or how slow
to stick the knife
in

how deep

appreciate the taste
of whatever
spills out

this is
a slow knowledge

practice

change your name
as often
as necessary

john sweet


Past Time

The Boston tar hissed heat through the soles of my sneakers, up to my ankles. Litter was stamped to this moist blacktop. Blurs of people marched onward, swallowing soda, chomping on hot dogs, and scrambling their fingers to gather the remains of their potato chip bags. Pigeons pecked at the waste which dropped at random. In Boston, everything moves and reacts. I stopped, spitting my last mouthful of Gatorade onto a brick wall. My mouth was dried up. A second later, I chucked the bottle down an alley way, smashing it. The machine of people walking down the street stalled, glancing over. It soon clicked back on. The city inbreeds a fear of strangers into everyone. No one was going to look at me long. I was gone. Bile scraped my stomach with sharpened finger nails. I scowled like a worn out pirate.

In front of me, Fenway Park stood like a castle. The stadium flung the roar of the crowd over its walls; the mouth of a child lying on its back screaming for food. The crowd couldn't be satisfied. Sweat scalded my eyes. Two days ago, I promised to meet three of my friends at a pub before the game. Obviously, I was too late. I was not even good at lying to myself. I was not here for the game. But, I had to focus on something. Baseball was safe. Why did I walk down to the Park.

My inner thigh stung after being chaffed by my shorts which relentlessly whipped my skin. Christ, I felt like I had been jogging for miles. I had been running but at a walk's pace. I turned around and started back. My hangover had been pouring out of my skin all day; it finally was subsiding. About time. The heat waves fluttered like the nausea in my stomach. My nose was stuffed to the max; the remnants of last night's cocaine supplied spurts of energy to my body. A fake feeling. It was the first time I had used that shit in years, now I remembered why I quit. Funny how old supports line up in stressful times. I didn't want to walk back up this street. The car windshields lining the street launched sparks into my eyes. They watered to the limit. The God damned heat. I must have passed ten miles of sidewalk to get here.

The dull finish of her tarnished grey Horizon, blemished with rust, blended into the assortment of old and new vehicles. I wandered past it twice and cursed bitterly. I couldn't fool myself, hell, I didn't want to see it. It marked the spot. Earlier, when we first arrived and parked outside the abortion clinic, a woman



in new blue jeans and a white T-shirt screamed in my face. I should have punched the bitch, but she wasn't a bitch, she was right. "Murderer!" I never hit girls anyway. The crowd around the door parted like the red sea when six policemen marched towards it.

Entering into the clinic reminded me of the feeling of being led around blindfolded in a cool cellar. I felt calm, but couldn't really focus on anything. I saw colors, but objects seemed to run out of their boundaries. All I could do was hold her hand, that took all I had. I felt dizzy and wanted to run away, just get the hell out of there. I pretended to go to the bathroom and never came back. I never caught back up with her before... There really was no chance of it happening anyway. I was physically in a state of sickening numbness, mentally taped together, and emotionally erased. Years later, I had trouble holding babies; I had to switch abortion commercials. At the end of some work days, I would stare blankly-feel old, feel nothing. We never really talked about it. Eventually, I did not see her, but when I let my mind go, a grey cinder block lay on my chest.

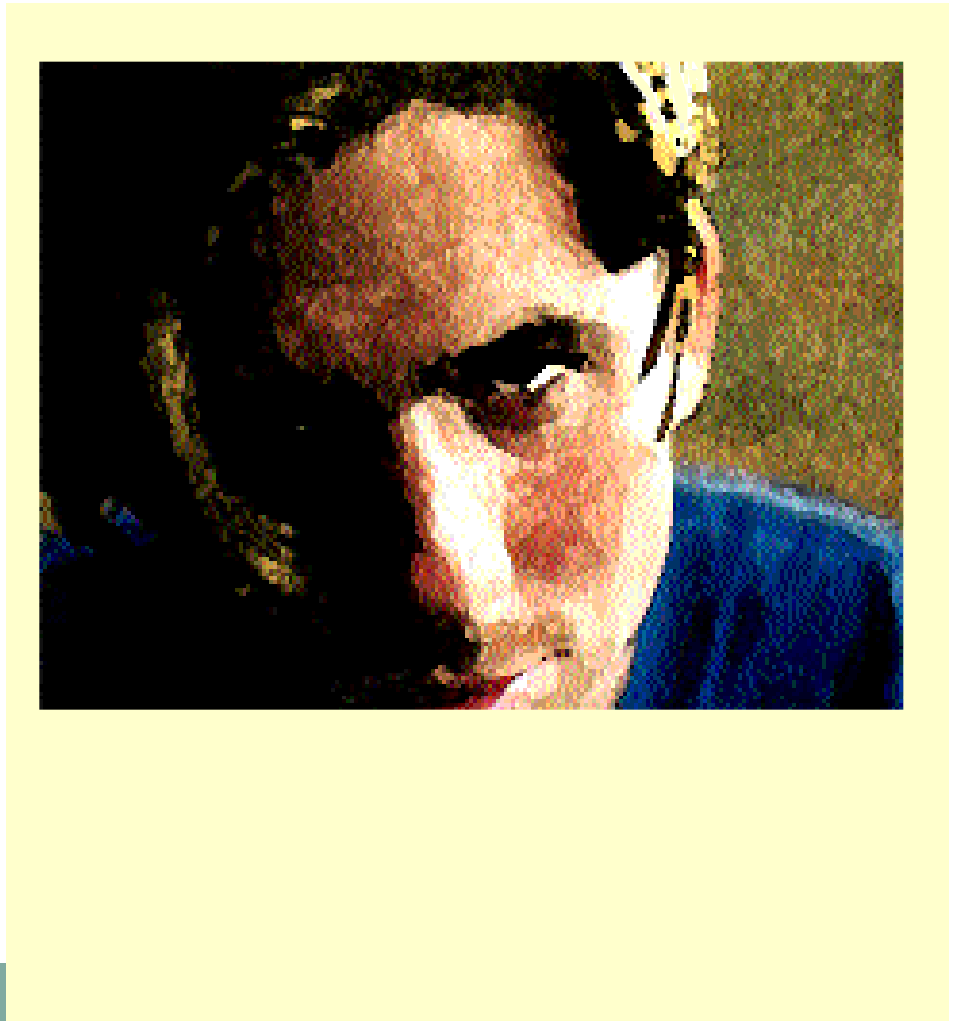
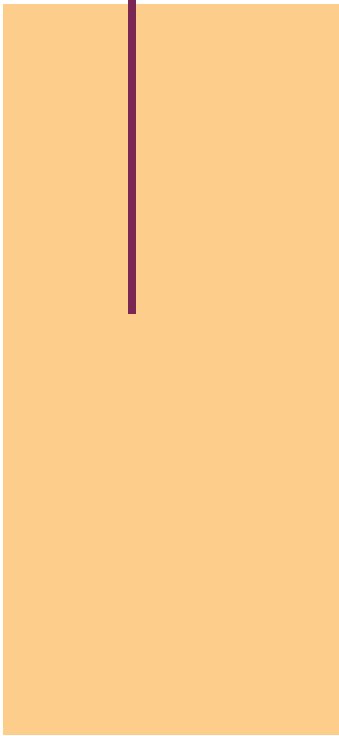
Death is concrete.

When we met on her way back to the car, I didn't smile or say anything funny; I barely held her hand. Things were different. Responsibility had been shirked; I was instantly older. I knew better. My drug and alcohol hangover clouded nothing.

She cried and cried and I told her to stop. I wasn't going to cry, I didn't cry. You just can't bring some things back. Nothing is ever the same even after a normal day, things change. Sometimes, I wish I was eight years old and the major commitment of my life was making sure that I was home by six for supper. Face it, that wish is useless in reality, absolutely useless, except for a five minute mental escape.

My emotions were paralyzed for years, I never fully bounced back. You can't replace some things.

brian mcNabb



why things are

He insists over her doubts that it will be a fine spring weekend, the first truly fine one after the long rough winter. But by the time they reach the cabin it is snowing hard. The snow has begun as sharp, fine crystals, turned into styrofoam-like pellets, and ended up as steady, heavy flakes.

"The multiple kinds of snow," he says, "that the Eskimos each have a different name for. That's an interesting study, linguistics. I should go back to school and become a linguist."

She says nothing.

The cabin is stripped bare. Everything gone except the andirons in the fireplace. The andirons, and on the hearth the want ads and Trends section from last November's newspaper.

"Well, at least they left us the paper and those things," he says. "What do you call them?"

"Andirons," she says.

"And-irons. I guess they were too heavy to bother with."

They dig in the snow for deadfall, but the snow is already deep and the deadfall is hard to find. He breaks easy-to-reach dead branches off trees for kindling.

"Here," she says, kneeling at the hearth. "Give me the paper. Let me do it."

He gives her the want ads first. "Never did me much 400d," he says. "You get there and they've already had 300 applicants for the one position."

She tears the sheets into strips and crumples the strips into little balls which she places strategically under the kindling.

Now he is reading the Trends section. "'Why Things Are.' You ever read that column?"

"Nope."

"The first question here goes, 'Why is urine yellow?' Good question. Let's see, it talks about bilirubin 'a yellow pigment found in bile and urine...' Hey, I knew little Billy Rubin in third grade! A jaundice pissed-off little kid..."

He looks up at her to see if she is smiling, but she's blowing on the paper to keep it going.

"Give me some more," she says, reaching her hand back.

"Okay," he says. "Here goes 'Why Things Are.'"

She tears the paper, crumples it, blows. He says:

"Actually, I've got something better than that."

She turns. "What."

"For emergencies," he says. He digs in his pack. He produces a large, flat bottle of slivovitz. A third it's gone already. "Isn't this an emergency? Flambe them logs."

She turns back to the fire and blows. He takes a drink. The fire catches.

"It's the andirons," he says. "Brings the oxygen up underneath. Oxygen's a poison in high concentrations, and an explosive too. But it's also necessary for life. How does that grab you?"

He takes another long pull and begins to sing:

Love is like oxygen

You get too much, you get too high

Not enough and you're gonna die...

He looks out the window at the snow. “Why Things Are. Well, I’ve got some questions for the man. One: why doesn’t snow ever come down in major chunks? Get packed together up there somewhere and come smashing down in big, huge snowballs and get it over with? why those slow, gentle flakes? Two: why does water freeze from the top down? That I’d like to know. Doesn’t it get colder the deeper you go?”

“I’ve got one,” she says. “How come an ant can carry forty times its weight and some humans can’t even carry their own weight?”

“That’s a good one,” he says, nodding soberly. “That’s a very good question. Hey,” he says, “that’s a good fire. Those andirons. Gee they look heavy. what are they, anyway? What does the design represent?”

“That looks like a fleur-de-lis on top,” she says.

“Fleur-de-lis. That doesn’t seem right, for an andiron.”

He stares into the fire. “Oh shit. Oh shit. I think I’ve got it. An andiron factory.”

“An andiron factory,” she repeats slowly.

“With gag andirons! Say, like a pair of fireman with big hats: the bars that hold the wood could be shaped like hoses. Or a couple of steelworkers, with those poles they use to feed the furnaces. Or welders, complete with little masks made of fire-resistant glass. It’ll be great! All we need is our own forge, a little foundry.”

“A little foundry,” she says.

“You bet! How about this: a pair of witches stirring cauldrons.”

“The cauldrons could be hollow,” she says. “You could fill them with toddies or the hot drink of your choice, and the fire would keep them hot.”

“There you go.” His gaze rolls down at her like a rearing horse’s as he tilts his head back for another slug.

“Two dragons,” he says, wiping his chin. “Also hollow. Their mouths wide open, you can see the flames and smoke inside them.”

He leans over and breathes fire-air into her face. She pushes him away and he loses his balance and lapses, with a laugh, against the pile of damp firewood.

She turns back to the fire. “Phoenixes,” she says. “Rising from the ashes.”

“Hey! Right there’s the name of our firm: Phoenix Andiron Go. I love you, baby.” He thrusts the bottle at her. “Toast?”

She ignores him.

“Bosnia’s best,” he shrugs, and drinks.

The snow cracks a branch outside like gunfire. She gets up and walks to the door. He grabs her ankle.

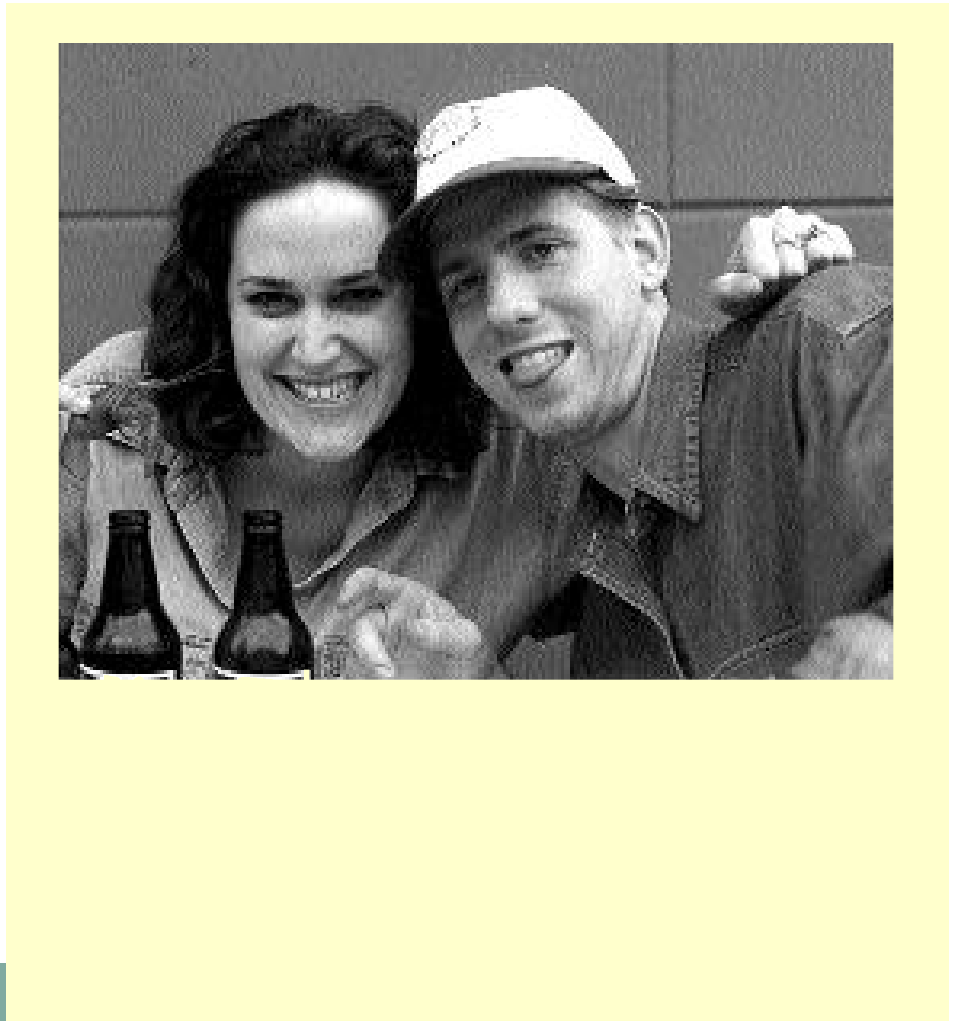
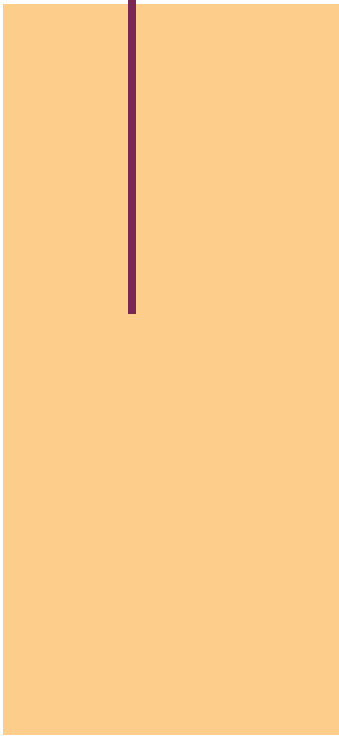
“Naked guys with hard-ons,” he growls, “big old iron hard-ons sticking into the hot, hot fire...”

She pushes him back with her booted foot, leaving a broken waffle of dirty snow on his warm throat.

“Goddamnit, Stephen, I’ve got to get more wood!”

He staggers to his feet. His throat and his face and his brain are on fire. He stumbles to the door of the cabin and tries to help her push, but already the drifting snow has sealed it shut.

joseph skinner



decorating the palm trees

my mother

always started trends
in our neighborhood

take christmas,
for example:

one christmas
in addition to decorating
the tree we had inside,
she took italian lights

and strung them along
each branch of the
palm tree in front of
our house

dad even put me in the
bucket of the tractor
so i could reach

next year,
a few more houses with
palm trees decorated

the year after,
more than half the houses

then she bought
ornaments for her tree,
big, round,
foot-wide
ornaments

next year,
a few more houses
had ornaments

the year after,
more than half the houses

my mother
was always the first

janet kuypers

that grin

The speaker is former
Carousel Club waitress
Esther Ann Mash.

For that meeting, Jack demanded
absolute privacy and no
interruptions. I was the only
person allowed to enter
the room and that was just
to serve drinks and get out.
There were seven altogether,
including Ruby: five
dark, swarthy men dressed
in suits, looking very
businesslike, like
gangsters out of some movie,
came in about ten thirty
with another man dressed
real casual, didn't fit
in with the rest at all.
Everyone else kept ordering mixed
drinks but this wimpy looking
little guy kept ordering beer.
They talked until about
one A.M. and then the men
in suite left, Jack went
into his office, and the other
guy stayed until closing
watching the strippers,
couldn't take his eyes off them.
I might not remember a name,
but I always remember a face —
that man was Lee Harvey Oswald.
I'd played up to the others and discovered

they were Mafia buys form Chicago.
It was a serious meeting
and though I didn't hear what
they were talking about I am convinced
they discussed killing Kennedy.
I had a very bad feeling, a premonition,
that I had better get away
from Dallas, so I moved to Phoenix.
I didn't pay much attention to the news
after the assassination but on Sunday
morning my children were watching
TV when the police were moving
Oswald. Ruby shot him and I screamed
"Oh my god!," thought "that's the weird
little man at that secret meeting
with Jack and those Mafia types."
I saw that grin on Oswald's face
just before Jack shot him.
He was smiling, thinking Jack
was his friend. I didn't want
to get involved, so I kept quite.
But now I have a blood clot
on the right side of my brain
and somebody needs to know this
before I die.

david cooper

ATtribution: Marrs, Crossfire: The Plot that
Killed Kennedy (NY: Carroll & Graf, 1989)
pp. 408-409.



have a party

if there was ever a time
when all the kids were
going to be out for the
evening, and dad was going
somewhere, too, and mom
would end up alone in the
house for a while, she
would say that she was
going to have a party while
everyone was gone, and
she'd smile

musical

she never wanted to sing,
dad was the one that was more musical,
i guess, she always said she
sounded just awful, and dad even
agreed. he'd make a humorous threat,
like, be careful, or i'll make mom sing.
but one thing mom was always
musical at was yawning,
i think she could hum a song while
she yawned. usually, though, she
would just start her yawn with a
high pitch, then change key by key
for five or six notes. the most unique
yawn i've ever heard. sometimes
we'd all just be quiet watching
television and out would come one
of mother's original scores. it would
always make one of us smile.

janet kuypers

A HOLIDAY TAIL

An Urban Fable

It was a December twenty-fourth unlike any December twenty-fourth in recent memory. The ground was blanketed with ice from a snowfall two days earlier, and it was quite cold. They even predicted more snow by nightfall.

Imagine that. A cold and snowy Christmas Eve just like the old snapshots in the family album! What a relief. Maybe this year's holiday conversation wouldn't center around how pollution and its ensuing global warming trends conspired to take the "feel" out of Christmas.

These thoughts flashed inside Moira's head as she and Joad slowly made their way up Fairview Avenue in Jersey City. Moira liked the crisp smell of the cold air, but the ice frightened her. She hoped her fear wouldn't be transmitted to Joad. She tried to relax her grip on him.

When they reached the corner Moira leaned over and patted Joad's head. The dog barely felt his master's affection.

The ice and traffic were making him too nervous to cross the street. Crossing streets was once an easy feat for Joad, but now he hated it. He's hated it for several years.

They stood on the corner of Fairview Avenue through two complete traffic light changes, waiting for Joad's decision.

Each time Moira heard the traffic stop and felt people next to her cross the street, she directed Joad to move forward. He refused. The dog could feel Moira's impatience as she fidgeted with his harness.

Joad was breathing heavily when he finally took his first step. Perhaps the cold steam from his breath obscured his vision, or maybe it was his owner's anxiety that clouded his judgement. Nevertheless he proceeded to lead Moira into the street.

She smelled the first hint of danger — a blast of diesel fuel. "Stop!" "Stop!" shouted pedestrians from both sides of the street. Moira yanked back on Joad's harness and froze.

A turning bus cut right in front of her, missing them by inches.

Moira's abrupt stop caused her to lose her footing on the slippery pavement. Down she went. Joad's tail drooped between his legs and he lowered his head as a rush of people came to Moira's aid. As they helped her to her feet she heard a man say, "What's wrong with that stupid dog?"

"It was my fault, not the dog's," said Moira. She patted Joad on his shoulder and thanked the people for helping her.

Joad's tail remained folded underneath him as they cautiously made their way to the sidewalk. If Moira could see, she'd know that her dog's tail was usually tucked away. He worried so much of the time about her safety it'd been ages since he was able to wag it in joy or relief.

The block just ahead of Moira and Joad was one of the most treacherous in the city. It was lined with abandoned, burned out buildings. This meant that no one had cleared away any of the snow. It was ignored. The entire length of the block was one shiny sheet of thick, slick ice. Other pedestrians simply avoided this dangerous stretch of sidewalk by crossing the street.

Moira knew nothing of the peril she was approaching. But Joad knew. He could see how crowded it was across the street. It made him shiver to realize that he and his master were completely alone. Not one soul was nearby. If something should happen, Joad knew there would be no one around to help Moira this time.

To steady her footing on the sidewalk Moira took short, heavy steps that crunched into the ice. She believed that these crunching sounds was the ice screaming out in pain as her boots cracked its spine.

“I’m sorry,” Moira whispered to the pavement.

Joad, who was much lower to the ground, knew the ice couldn’t hear her apology above her crackling footsteps.

At the beginning of her blindness Moira thought that her hearing had, and would, become more potent. But as she matured she understood that her ears hadn’t grown more powerful, only her concentration. And as her concentration grew, so did her imagination.

She enjoyed making up stories based on sounds, especially the sounds of nature. Without visual distractions, sounds became pieces of puzzles whose final outcome would be dictated by her tastes and moods. Moira totally disregarded where or how they had originated. And if these sounds produced paintings in her mind, then wind was her favorite color.

A delicious intimacy flourished between Moira and the wind. Sometimes it whistled at her, or tried to seduce her with soft spring breezes. Other times she’d capture and cage it, like on hot summer days when she’d pull out her electric fan and force the wind to serve her. Moira would listen to the breeze spew out between the thin bars that protected her from the rotary, begging to be released from this unnatural act. More often than not she’d take pity on this artificial breeze. Her finger would click off the fan and she’d sit in her hot apartment, sweaty but satisfied.

Winter winds were fickle. Many people thought of winter winds as bitter, but Moira knew better. They weren’t bitter, just mischievous—and protective. It’s mischief could be seen in the formation of ice. The wind and the water loved playing together during winter because nothing delighted water more than to be turned into ice.

Moira appreciated how water was always at work replenishing, refreshing, and cleaning. Yet despite this terrific workload, it disturbed her that the only time water seemed to be acknowledged was when it was cursed during droughts, vilified as acid rain, or slandered when it could no longer carry away the foul smelling wastes dumped into it.

During winter rainstorms or snow sprinklings, Moira would listen to the drops of moisture beg for !an increase in the wind chill factor so it could freeze over. The wind, who was quite sophisticated because of its intensive travels, understood the water’s need to develop a thick, protective skin against the criticism people threw at it. And if that skin was an exquisite icicle or a slippery patch of ice, so be it.

The dog hesitated as Moira urged him forward. But what could he do? There was absolutely no way of avoiding that terrible stretch of ice. He thought of directing Moira into the street in order to bypass it, but that was too dangerous.

The traffic was too heavy. He tried to get Moira to cross the street to safety, but she didn’t understand his nudging.

“Come on, Joad. Stop acting so silly. Why do you want to cross the street? You know Uncle Charlie’s building is on this side of the street! Don’t let that bus scare you. We’re not in any danger. It’s just a sidewalk. Let’s go.” Joad tread lightly on his paws, but it made no difference. The thoroughness with which Moira, out of necessity, crushed the ice in her path could not be ignored.

The ice’s crackling anguish caught the wind’s attention.

Moira heard a bellow, then felt a violent gust of air drop down on her. It raked across her face like a sharp pair of scissors; she felt certain she had frostbite. The wind then swerved off to the left, gathering up chunks of ice that it hurled against Moira and Joad like exploding bits of shrapnel.

“Stop it! Please!” Moira called out. “It’s not my fault.” But the wind simply absorbed her words into its increasing roar.

Joad knew Moira couldn’t stand up to this barrage much longer, and if she fell, the wind and the ice would surely do her serious harm. So the dog began to dig furiously with his claws.

His old legs ached as they tore at the ice until he had broken through to the pavement.

Joad then lifted his head and howled, howled so mightily that the wind had to take notice. He returned to his digging until a bald spot appeared on the ground, free of ice. Then the dog howled again at the wind, threatening to make the bald spot even larger if it did not stop its attack.

The wind died down.

Moira was stung by the cold, but she understood why the wind had retreated. Joad had rescued her. Uncle Charlie’s apartment building was just on the corner, so she quickened her pace. Joad limped along on his torn and frozen front paws, trying to keep up.

When they entered the building Moira crouched by Joad. “Are you okay, boy?” Joad licked her face as her fingers deftly examined him. When she touched his raw paws she gasped. Once inside her uncle’s apartment she insisted he give her warm towels to wrap around Joad’s bruises.

The Christmas Eve party was pretty much like all the other holiday parties she had attended there for the past four years. Moira would sit in an overstuffed chair by the living room window with Joad stretched out across her ankles.

“That’s a beautiful Labrador Retriever,” said a woman with a smoker’s husky voice.

“Yes he is. And he’s very bright, too,” replied Moira. An uncomfortable silence followed until Moira heard,

“It’s a lovely Christmas ribbon you’ve threaded ‘round his collar.”

“Yes, he seems to enjoy it.”

“Can I get you anything to drink, Moira? You are Moira, Charlie’s niece?”

Moira giggled. “How did you recognize me? Did Uncle Charlie complain that I wear the same old Christmas Eve outfit every year?”

Moira heard the sizzle of a struck match as the woman nervously lighted a cigarette. She did not want to make the woman uneasy. It was so tiresome to have sighted people take everything she said so seriously. If someone at the party were to ask her what she wanted for Christmas, Moira would answer it would be a sign she could hang off her back that would read — BEWARE - BLIND PERSON WITH A SENSE OF HUMOR.

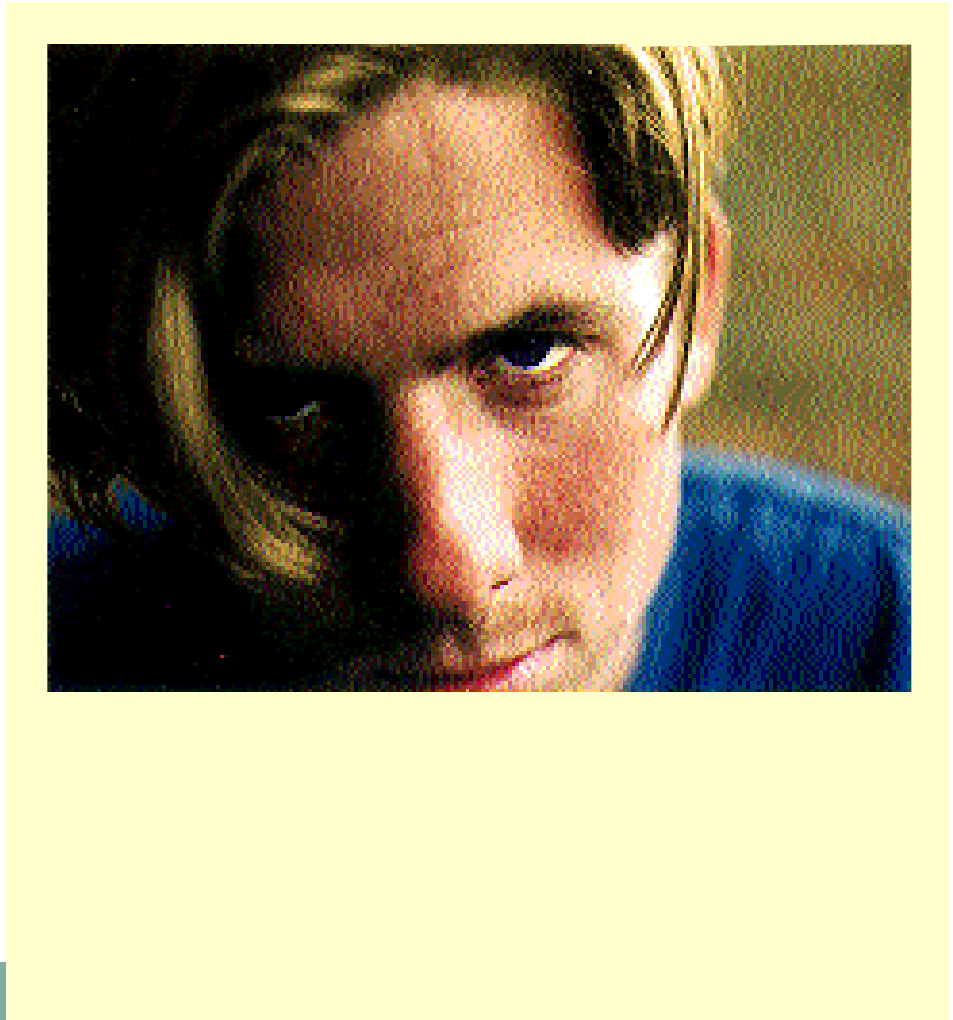
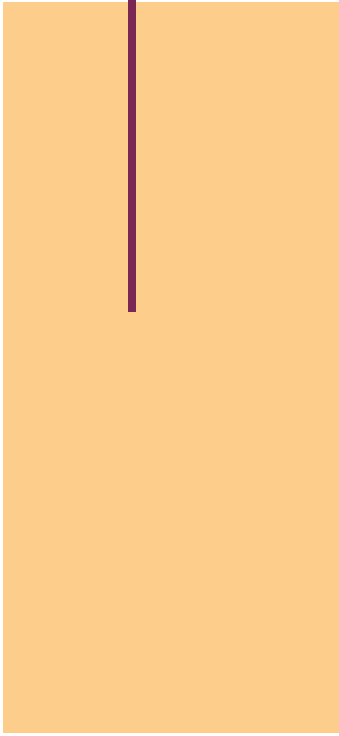
“Thank you for offering me a drink,” said Moira, “ but I’m not thirsty. I would appreciate it if you could get Joad a bowl of water.”

Moira liked being by the window because it was always drafty and she enjoyed listening to the wind force its way inside. It would make gurgling sounds as it delighted in sneaking a chill into the warm and cozy room. The warmth felt wonderful to Joad, but he was too nervous to really enjoy it. All he could think about was the trip home. He’d have to lead Moira through that minefield of ice and wind — and do a better job of it this time. And those traffic lights — red and green. Green and red. Even though he was color blind he knew they were Christmas colors.

Uncle Charlie’s girlfriend played his piano as all the guests joined in the singing. Moira disliked her voice so she silently mouthed the words. Everyone laughed when Joad yelped to the final chorus of Little Drummer Boy.

“Moira, is Joad being critical of our singing or has he been overtaken by the Christmas Spirit?” asked Uncle Charlie.

“I think he’s just anxious to chew on that drumstick we’re all praising,” grinned Moira.



“At his age?”

Moira frowned and did not answer her uncle.

“How old is your dog?” asked a male voice Moira couldn’t identify.

“Thirteen.”

“I hope I look as good when I’m —let’s see, thirteen times seven— ninety-one.”

“He’s thirteen not ninety-one,” replied Moira.

When everyone retired to the living room to play a board game Moira declined the invitation to join in.

She preferred to sit in her chair stroking Joad.

Moira enjoyed listening to the clicking of dice as it passed from hand to hand. But she loved those fraction of a second silences after the dice cleared the player’s fingers, before they hit the board. Anything was possible during that brief pause, that split second before good news or bad news bounced on the cardboard.

Believing in possibilities was Moira’s favorite Christmas activity. During the eleven and a half years since Joad came into her life she established a secret Christmas Eve ritual based on an ancient legend and a lot of hope.

Moira had to be home before midnight.

“What time is it, Uncle Charlie?”

Her uncle looked at his watch. “Eleven-twenty.”

“My God, I have to go!”

Uncle Charlie grinned and shook his head. “This is where my niece turns into Cinderella. She has to return home before the clock strikes twelve.”

“I must leave. I’m sorry.”

“I’m the one who’s sorry,” said Uncle Charlie. “You never stay to help us trim the tree. I only wine and dine my guests so I can turn all of you into my personal labor force.” Everyone laughed except Moira. It was getting late.

“I don’t want to be rude, Uncle Charlie, but I have no choice.”

Uncle Charlie hugged his niece. “I’ll give you a lift home.” Joad’s ears perked up and he barked his approval. Although Moira wanted to accept her uncle’s offer to drive her home, she was afraid it might offend Joad.

“That’s alright. Don’t bother. Joad and I can make it home fine.”

The dog’s ears drooped.

“It’s snowing pretty hard out there,” said Uncle Charlie.

“That’s all the more reason why you shouldn’t have to move your car.”

Waiting in the lobby as Moira pulled on her gloves, Joad watched a sweetly scented woman enter the building and begin pinching snowflakes off her fur coat. The dog shuddered.

The trip home was a complete success. Enough snow had fallen so that the threat of ice was buried under a white powder of sure footing. The walk from Uncle Charlie’s had gone smoothly, but it took twice as long because of the snow. Moira had forgotten to add this extra time to her calculations.

She was nervous as the elevator lifted her and Joad up to their ninth floor apartment. It was six minutes to twelve and she had to be in her apartment by midnight. Christmas would be ruined if she was a minute late. A tradition is a tradition, even if it proved frustrating. Ever since her first Christmas with Joad, Moira clung to the belief that animals could be gifted with speech at midnight on Christmas Eve. It was her favorite Christmas legend and she prayed for it each year.

But for the past eleven years she was disappointed. Still, it was unthinkable not to try. The year she didn’t pray might be the year it would come true. Moira Essegian did not want to take that chance.

The young woman and her dog kneeled by the tiny nativity scene displayed on the living room coffee table.

As Moira silently mouthed her words, she gently stroked the animals surrounding the manger scene. Joad raised his head, sniffing the air. He was hoping to detect a different kind of smell. A smell of change. A smell of success.

"Smells the same to me," said Joad.

Moira opened her eyes.

"I'm sorry," said Joad. "I don't mean to be negative."

"You spoke!" shouted Moira.

"I spoke!" Joad squealed.

What followed wasn't an excited conversation. The young woman and old dog lapsed into an embarrassed silence. A silence of shyness.

Instead of speaking, they retreated into their familiar closeness of touch. Moira tugged at the back of Joad's ear. Joad nuzzled his face into the crook of Moira's arm. She always loved the burst of cold on her skin from his nose.

"Were you born blind?" asked Joad.

Moira shook her head.

"How did you lose your sight?"

"Mexican food," answered Moira.

"Pardon me?" Joad responded. "Did you say Mexican food?"

Moira giggled. "That's right. You see, when I was seventeen the state of New Jersey awarded me a driver's license. I celebrated by inviting three of my closest friends to a Mexican feast in a tiny chili joint by the Jersey shore."

Moira patted her stomach. "I think I'm still living off the calories from all the chimichangas and refried beans I ate that day!

"After the feast I took my friends for a moonlight drive to Wildwood Crest. But I felt so full the seat belt pressing against my belly irritated me. So I unbuckled it."

"A harness is a good thing," said Joad, proudly.

Moira tenderly patted her dog's harness. "Is it, Joad?"

"As long as it can keep you safe," whispered Joad. He began to feel uneasy.

"Well, driving at night is much harder than driving in daylight," continued Moira. "Perhaps that contributed to my collision with the truck. I don't remember too much about the accident, except for the sound of my head exploding through the windshield. And the darkness."

Joad started to shake. He suddenly felt like an unbuckled automobile. Moira responded to Joad's discomfort by rubbing the crest of his neck.

"But that's not what I'd call a wonderful Christmas Eve story," smiled Moira. "I'd much rather hear something about yourself before I met you."

"You mean when I was young?" asked Joad.

"Sure. When you were a puppy."

"I was born in Boise, Idaho," said Joad.

"I know that," laughed Moira.

"But did you know that my mother, Gwyndulyn, was a prize winning Labrador Retriever?"

"No, I didn't. That's wonderful, Joad."

"I was the friskiest puppy in my litter," said Joad, proudly. "I inherited my mother's shiny black coat and intelligence. What I didn't inherit was her aloofness. I

guess when my owners saw I didn't have my mother's regal bearing they decided I should go into something that was helpful.

"As a matter of fact, I was so friendly my owners weren't sure whether to follow through on their plan to donate me to a 4-H family to begin training as a seeing eye dog. Overly friendly dogs don't make good guide dogs because we're too easily distracted."

"You're a splendid guide dog. The best," insisted Moira.

"Well, after a year with my 4-H family, the Tedescos, I was given to the Guiding Eyes Foundation for intensive training. I guess I kept my friendliness in check."

"That's where we met," Moira grinned. "Do you remember your other problem?"

"What problem?" asked Joad, rather defensively.

"Come on, Joad. Are you telling me you've forgotten already?"

"I'm afraid I've forgotten many things over the years, Moira."

Moira jumped to her feet. "Your chewing! You had this constant need to chew that worried the instructors!"

Joad laughed at the memory. "I did have a rather fine bite, didn't I?"

Moira nodded. "They didn't want me to take you. They wanted to spend more time on your chewing problem before sending you out in the world. But I wouldn't let them. I wanted you the moment I first touched you."

"Your hand was like a mud puddle and a brush all in one," recalled Joad.

"Thank you...I think," grinned Moira.

The conversation waned. A nervousness overcame both speakers. Time was running out. The girl and the dog had not said what they really wanted to say. Moira squeezed her hands together and bit down on her knuckle.

"I'm sorry, Joad," she murmured.

"Sorry? What could you possibly be apologizing to me for, Moira?"

"For the life I've forced you into." There, she said it. Her heart pounded as she awaited his response.

Joad's jaw dropped open with surprise. He tried to respond, but words stuck in his throat like a splintered bone.

"These past eleven years you've been on the job twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Sometimes at night I dream I let you loose in an open field. I love to imagine you running and jumping and playing. I wish I could let you play, Joad. I wish I could give you time all for yourself."

Joad lowered his head into Moira's lap. "But I'm not supposed to play. I have to take care of you." When the dog noticed the pain in Moira's eyes after saying this he quickly added, "I want to take care of you."

"It hasn't been fair. I know that," said Moira.

"You're wrong," replied Joad. "You put too much value on play. Any stray can spend the day playing. But I'm different. I'm special."


Moira nodded in agreement. "And I'm selfish."

Joad, his tail firmly tucked underneath him, slowly made his way to the end of the room. He turned and faced his owner.

"No, Moira. I'm the selfish one. For the past few years I've been letting you down. Whenever you've taken me out you've put yourself at risk. I'm too old to properly take care of you anymore. But I don't want to leave. And that's wrong. My whole life has been devoted to your welfare.

"I love you, Moira. But it's been a selfish love. I'm afraid I love my life with you more than my concern about your safety. I feel great shame. If I were a true friend I'd run away so you could get another dog, a better dog."

"I don't want another dog!" shouted Moira. "You're as thick as the people at the Foundation! For two years now they've been pestering me to retire you and obtain a younger model."



Joad lowered his head. "They're right. I can't do the job anymore." His tail seemed to disappear from view. Moira stretched out her arms. "Come here, Joad." After a slight pause he stiffly walked over to her and into a hug.

Moira tightened her grip on her dog. "So what if crossing a street's become more of an adventure. What's wrong with adventure?"

Joad wanted to protest but his speech came out garbled.

"I'm tired of talking," she said.

Joad licked Moira's face.

"If you don't mind continuing to look after me, let's not ever part," whispered Moira. "I trust in your heart, Joad. And you can trust in mine."

The dog barked his approval; the Christmas gift was over.

Joad rolled over on his back and yelped like a puppy. Moira was thrilled. It had been a long time since she had heard her dog so happy.

She leaned over and rubbed Joad's belly just the way he loved to have it rubbed. Moira's hands traced a line from his stomach to his chest and back again. Her fingers moved up and down like a speedy typist. It was a delicious massage.

"I'm going to get you a special Christmas treat," said Moira.

Once again Joad barked his approval.

Moira stood up and went into the kitchen. While she was fumbling inside a kitchen cabinet trying to find the special holiday biscuits she had bought Joad, a strange thing occurred.

Moira felt a slight breeze at her ankles. This puzzled her. There were no windows open and no drafts. The landlord had recently insulated the apartment. But stranger than the breeze was the exquisite music accompanying it. It was a sweet hymn of joy, a song of thanksgiving.

Moira had heard the wind perform thousands of different sounds, but this one was totally new. It made her mouth wreath into a huge smile. She scratched her head and abandoned her search for dog biscuits.

She kneeled on the floor and lowered her head. The sweet breeze washed over her. It's music poured into her ears. Moira was tempted to track down the origin of this musical breeze, but decided to stay on the floor and just enjoy it.

If Moira hadn't lost her sight she could have solved the mystery by simply peeking into the living room.

There, stretched out on the living room rug, was Joad. His forgotten and unused tail was snapping back and forth, wagging joyfully. It was stirring up a breeze of happiness that sailed into the kitchen.

mark blickley

i seem to know animals

i seem to know animals. so here i am
in the middle of a cafe and there's this
dog here, it's the cafe owner's dog, i think,
and he's just walking around trying to get
some food from the tables and he stops and
looks at the nachos on my table. and he
looks at me. and i say, "oh, i know."
and he looked at me for a second, and
then he walked away.

tell me

envison a person unable to achieve their dreams. maybe it's due to forces
beyond their control. maybe it's because of inner flaws. that doesn't matter. just
envison a person that has a dream in life, and can work as hard as they can all
of their life, but never achieve it. they are doomed to never getting what they
think they want from their life.

now envison another person, who has the power, and manages to achieve their
goal. and then they realize that achieving their goal did not make them happy.
and so on to the next goal. and they work harder and harder and they manage
to achieve that goal as well. and achieving it did not make them happy, either.
and then they do this until they realize that they will be unhappy all of their
life, that none of the goals they achieve will make them happy, and they are
doomed to this life of everyone else admiring their successes, but feeling miser-
able because nothing is capable of making them happy.

which of these people have it worse? the one who never gets their dream? but
the concept of a dream exists, and it doesn't for the person who destroyed their
dream by achieving it. is the second one better off because they can have
wealth and admiration? but they aren't happy with what they achieve, in fact, it
irritates them that others think that their life is so wonderful. they have no
hope. but did they have hope as they were trying to achieve any one of their
goals?

why am i even asking you these questions? i've been trying to figure these
questions out for myself. if someone has any ideas. someone. anyone. tell me.

janet kuypers



Voyeur

We watched the rain fall
on blacktops and cars
her love stole away, sometimes
to other towns and bars

Casually we note: sardonically held
their golden wreaths have lied
naturally, unknown wisdom
crept up to us and died

You can see her loneliness
this woman-child
mourning her life before it's gone
and still we watch the rain fall.

ariane livernois

your grandchildren come over now
my nieces, nephews
excited to see grandma

you give them a treat
before they leave
candies, cookies

they're not pickles
but they remind me
of my grandmother

the stories i'd hear
about how good she was

i love her now
without ever seeing her face

but you see,
these kids
claire, marshall, joel, edward
your grandchildren

they get to see you
they get to spend time with you
they have more than
stories

they know your face
they know your voice

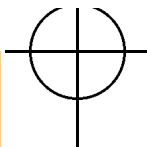
they love you now

but remember
they'll always love you
they'll always remember

they'll always love you

more than stories

janet kuypers



mark blickley

alan catlin

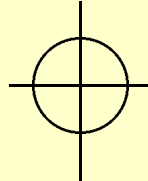
robert kimm

janet kuypers

c ra mcguirt

errol miller

john sweet



ben ohmart

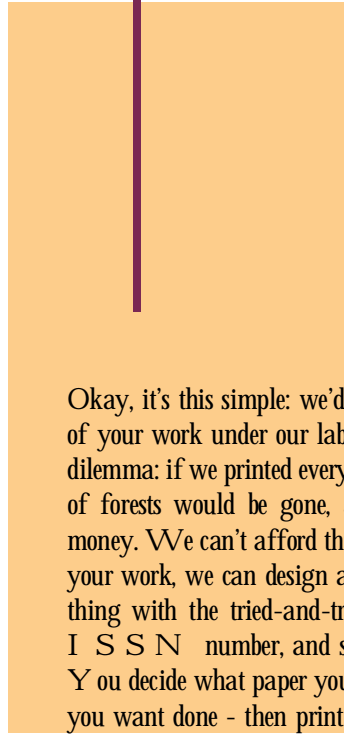
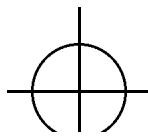
gary a. scheinoha

john sweet

cheryl townsend

paul weinman

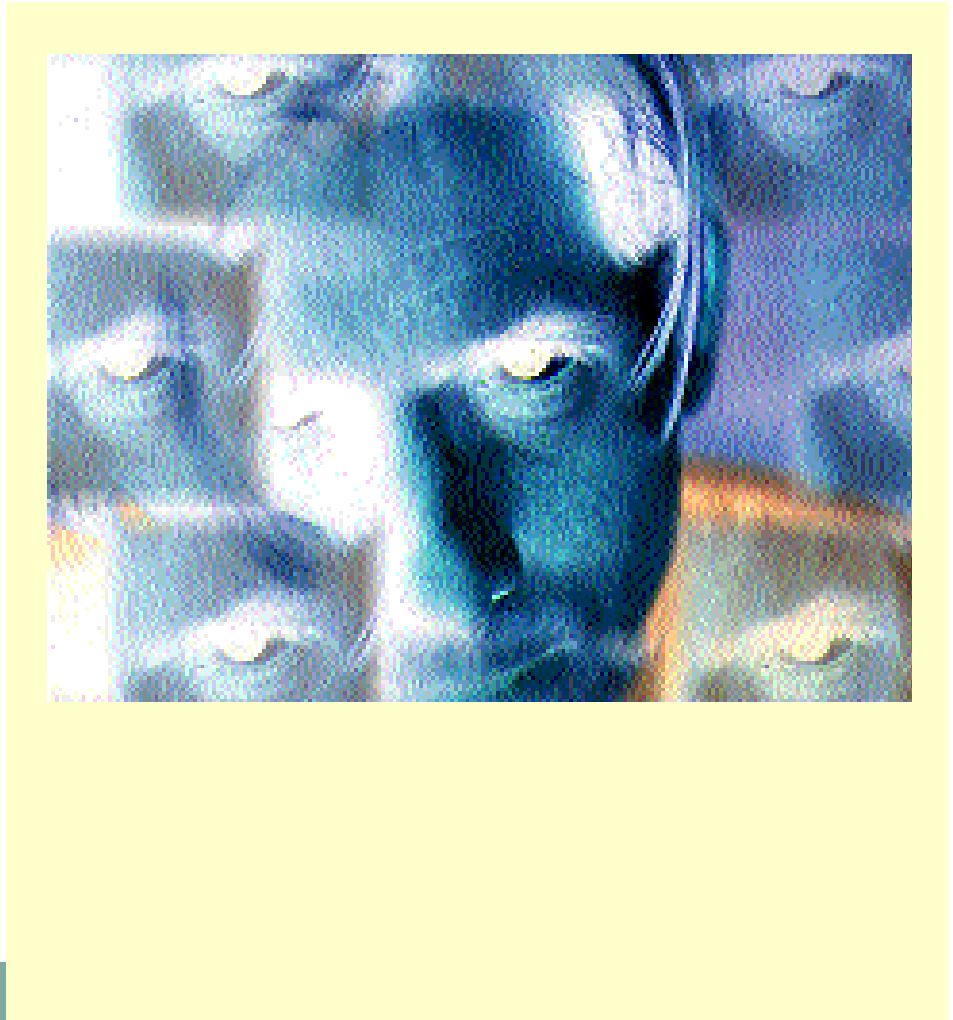
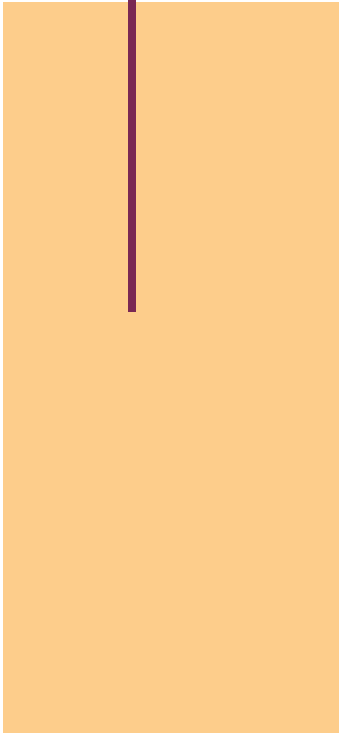
mary winters



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the nineteen ninety five poetry chapbook series





let's go

One summer day in August, I was sixteen at the time, Sandy and I were in the house, it was an average Thursday, mom was out golfing, dad was at Bob's farm yard, doing something man-like, cutting wood or something. The cleaning lady was at the house, I was getting ready for a summer job interview that morning.

The phone rings, I answer it, suddenly there's this strange voice on the other line talking, asking, "Is your mother there?" and my first instinct was that it was Greg on the other line, a friend of dad's, he always liked to put on a fake voice and try to fool the kids. So I put on my most cordial voice and said, "No she's not, may I take a message?"

and then the voice starts going on about how he's cut his finger and he has to go to the hospital, and then it finally occurs to me that it's my father, and he was in so much pain that he could barely speak. So he hangs up the phone and Sandy and I try to call the golf course, hoping to catch mom, but she already left, and while we waited for her to come home dad came home to get us and bring us to the hospital with him. His hand was wrapped in a shirt, half-soaked in blood. Sandy got in the wagon, but she told me to wait at home for mom. So dad

whipped the car out of the driveway and down the road, And I stood in the driveway, watching him drive away.

I was so distraught, I started to cry, but I had to keep myself together, because I didn't want to make it sound serious when I told her and make her more nervous.

I didn't want her to cry, he cut his finger, he'd need stitches, but he wasn't going to die.

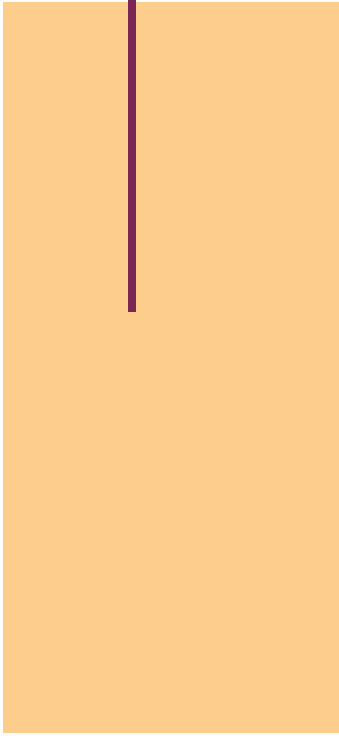
So I waited at the front window, and when I saw her car drive down the road I went to the garage.

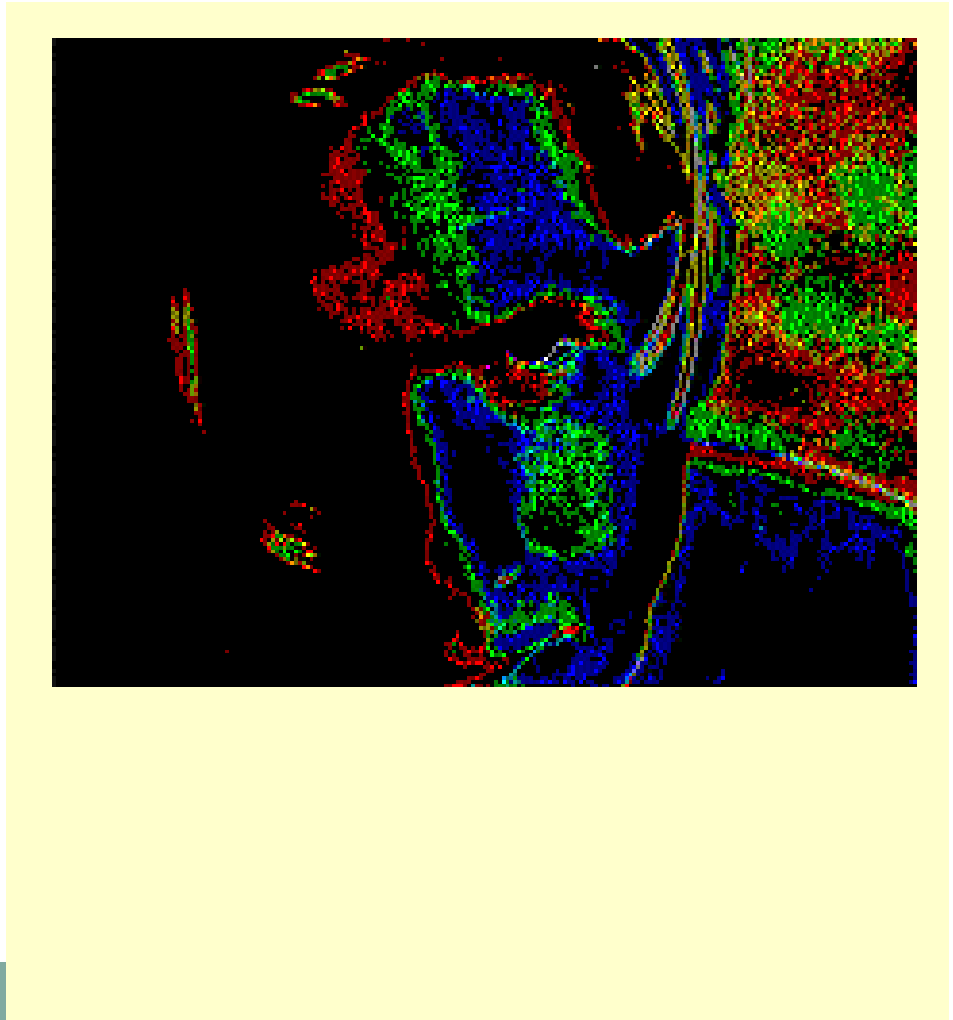
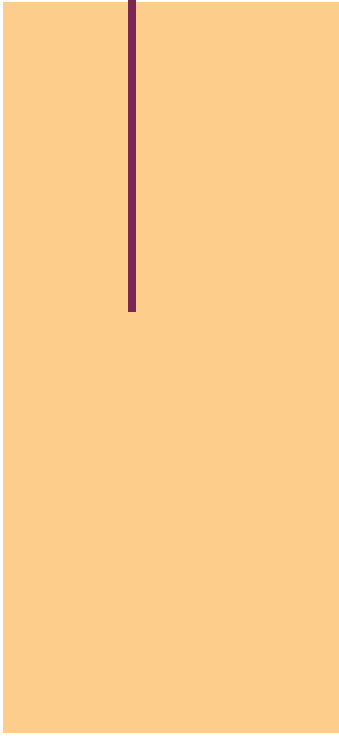
When she pulled in I hopped in the passenger side before she turned off the engine. "Come on, let's go," I said, with a smile on my face.

I tried to preface the story with "Let me just say, that everything is fine," but you just know when bad news is coming up. But I tried to make it sound funny, like dad the klutz cut his hand.

I hope I did a good job. For eleven blocks I was the one that had to make sure that everything was okay. I hope I did a good job.

janet kuypers






children churches & daddies

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stupid,
boring,
technical
crap:



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chapbooks:

1993: hope chest in the attic (chapbook and book), the gallery (computer program), knife, people today, dysfunctional family greeting cards, slate and marrow, dreaming of dandelions and ice cubes, addicted, new world order, gasoline and reason, the written word, the printed gallery, right there by your heart, rendering us, gabriel, magnolia christmas, how you looked then.

1994: paper backbone, winter prayers, looking through their window, games, order now, a (fe)male behind bars, two year journey, they told me their dreams, the window (book), city, it was a perfect house, pictures from a still life.

1995: things i saw alone, proud to be a part of things, love letters, scratching, still had to breathe, wrinkles in the palm of my hand. Upcoming chapbooks: house of slavs, come into my garden, texas, new york, in these desperate times, before the storm, some things instinctively hurt, the house is a ship, circling overhead, six stories, this is what it means, louisiana poems, quiet madmen, she thinks/he thinks, singular memories.