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metal earth
water wood

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the
elements



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down in the dirt

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churches
& daddies**

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You can't be free or strong until you can speak up



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t o c

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(a letter from the publisher)

In always deciding to test our limits, we searched for ways to change the convention of the “book”. I mean really, think about it, how many books that are 200 pages, with one poem after another, can a person really take? How many places have poetry and prose books out now? What can we do to make things different?



Well, we searched our little brains and came up with a few things:

1. Make the book really huge. *Wait, we did that with **Torture and Triumph**.*
2. Add an audio CD. *Wait, we did that with **Torture and Triumph**. Well, that's not a bad idea, though, so maybe we can try that on another book.*
3. Add a computer CD. *Wait, we did that with **Oh**.*
4. Turn the book sideways, so it's a wide book. *Wait, we did that with **Oh**.*
5. Make the book Square. *Hey, that's not a bad idea...*
6. Run a different cover. *Hmmm... what about a **matchbook**?*

This is how we set up **The Elements**, with fire as the prominent element on the pages and on the cover. We took pictures of wood, fire, water, earth, and we even opted to use a sparkler as a bookmark and enclose a real matchbook to match the book (please just don't set this book on fire!).

We're always looking for new ideas to make our books better, and we're always looking for audio to add to future CDs of writings and authors, so look for ideas and let us know how we can change the future work from Scars and CC&D to make it better for you!

Janet Kuypers

Rev. Janet L. Kuypers, Ph.D.

Doctor of Philosophy, University of Wexford, 1996, Reverend through the Universal Life Church, 1999



artwork by
Cheryl Townsend

Triangle Going South

Paul Cordeiro

I'm locked into work 16 hours
and the drive home takes another
45 minutes through Providence
which should be renamed
the potholed bend around hell.
My house whispers of lovesoaked
sheets and secrets while I'm away.
She takes a slower lover who feels conflicted
that I toil all day as he plucks off the wings
of my Asian butterfly.
Tom, whines to me like I don't know
he's the innocent party and still my buddy
and most injured by the flames which cause
his gas blower's misshapen
creations to have to get tossed.
His fingers are burnt to their ends
like a pot smoker's from too much pleasure.

Bedroom Vanity

Paul Cordeiro

I captured her small breasts
and shy gaze
long before he did.
But he says he created her innocence
and discovered her fresher body
like a new country
I passed over for years
without rollicking laughs.
He's started to sing to her in the shower
and she says he can go on longer
than an opera singer
hitting the high notes.
He loves her more than Russian
novelists and what gives pleasure
more than vodka and warm friends.
His world is grey and icy
and she is brighter
than a summer sky
and softer than the frozen ground melting.

Blasphemy's Child

A Great Costume

Michael Ceraolo

On Halloween he came to work
dressed as a hard worker
and no one recognized him

Etymology

Michael Ceraolo

The heart
of patriotism
is riot

Doug Saretsky

Here she comes
and I don't even know if I can face this girl
Here she is
and I know she could be the one
if things were just a little different
But here I am
sitting with my feet up
on a table here in some dingy-ass bar in the gaslight district
I'm in on her guest list and I'm watching her play
It's almost enough to make me believe in God again
I close my eyes and let the music take me somewhere I've never been
Every now and then she looks my way and winks
and I'm not thinking about love or eternal happiness
Instead I'm aching for a button I can push
that will systematically exterminate all her friends
Because they're the ones that destroyed our relationship
before it even had a chance to begin
I see the way they look at me
and I want to march right over there
Spit in their faces
Kick over their drinks
Cut their table in half with an axe
Anything to upset their safe little college night out

Fuck trying to change their minds
I want to live up to every negative
and shitty stereotype they have of me
I want them to shudder whenever my name is spoken
I want to move into their safe little hippie commune
get fired up on Old Style and watch them run for cover
I want to look at myself
in the reflection of an empty bottle of booze
and see what they see, see what they made me into
A walking, talking venom-spewing
personification of their friend Kirsten's
lick of better judgement
Just another casualty
of a punk rock guy getting all strung out on a normal girl
Falling through the cracks
and getting swept under the rug like a dirty little secret
Like a time in your life you wish you could just leave behind
But I don't cry or feel sorry for myself
Hell no
Instead I absorb the rejection and it becomes a part of me
I take it back with me over to the wrong side of the tracks
I now walk tall whenever I pass the bar where she works
The collar on my vest is up
The wraparound shades are shielding my eyes from the sun
I worked out today and feel tougher than shit

I'm an American nightmare, the leader of the freaks
Blasphemy's child
just a-walkin' the streets.

China Syndrome

Carolyn Garwes

I sent my mad grandmother
six white china horses.

I didn't know her address so I wrote
very carefully on the brown paper
in my biggest letters 'TO GRANDMA,
CARE OF THE LUNATIC ASYLUM,
OXFORD, THE WORLD, THE UNIVERSE'.

Of course, the parcel was returned
to my boarding school.

All the white horses were broken into pieces
like (I poetically imagined) my grandma's brain.
Hauled up before Matron, no sympathy offered,
just what a silly little girl I'd been,
I cried twice – once for my lost grandma
and once for my lovely horses.

I loved my mad grandmother.
I was born in her big bed.
My first clear childhood memory
is her safe lap and bosom
under a brown linen dress.
The dress had little china buttons
shaped like harebells all the way down
from its collar to its hem.
I learned to count on these buttons

and to recite my colours –
fawn, pink, blue, mauve, yellow, fawn, pink, blue.
And later we went for walks down leafy lanes
and she taught me poems about baby donkeys
and songs about bees in cowslips bells
and we'd dance along singing merrily, merrily.

I kept my mad grandmother
company in her big bed
when I came home from school
the first holiday after my granddad died.
Of course, we didn't know
she was my mad grandmother then.
My doll China Mary was tucked up between us.
China Mary had painted eyelashes
and a china head and curly brown hair.
She'd been to the Dolls' Hospital to be mended
after she'd fallen on her head and broken it.
My grandma squeezed me too hard in the night
in funny places and called me Harry,
over and over, weeping.
I was scared and shouted for my mother.

We visited my mad grandmother
in her new house the next time I came home from
school.
I waited with my mother outside locked doors
and there were long corridors of lino
and all the mad people who thought
they were Napoleon (my brother said)
and finally, my grandma sitting on a bed
in a brown dressing gown, not knowing who I was.
My mother said she'd had some special medicine
called easy tea which made her forget things.
Then she threw her teacup at the nurse and smashed it
and called my mother lots of rude names.

I thought my mad grandmother's head
could be fixed like China Mary's.
But, like Humpty Dumpty and my china horses,
it couldn't.

CONVERGENCE

Ryan Miller

Things happen that you don't understand. And unless they touch you in some individual way, have an impact on your existence, they remain little more than casual, momentary disturbances, isolated fragments without connection, without meaning within the context of the world in which you live.

More often than not you read about them in the newspaper, see them on the evening news. These incidents become something to mention to your wife at the dinner table.

Two silvery jetliners collide and fall out of the sky into the shimmering blue sea; hundreds die.

You think, "How could this happen with today's technology?" then you change channels until you come upon the intelligent new sitcom on Fox.

News of terrorists hijacking a busload of German tourists in a dusty white city on the coast of North Africa comes to you via the internet. You read with incomprehension the demands that the terrorists make. Religion and politics intertwine. Governments around the world stand fast in a multilateral refusal to give in to extortion. You watch a small, jumpy video image in poor resolution, a live feed; you see the bus set ablaze with the Germans still inside. Anyone attempting to escape is greeted with an angry fusillade from an automatic weapon.

You say out loud, "My God, what are they doing?" But these events do not concern you, hold no real importance for you. Then you double-click on a brightly colored link to a web page that someone you do not know has e-mailed to you. You are led to the home page of a pornographic site that specializes in images that have been taken into Photoshop and manipulated. The participants appear to be well-known actors, celebrities, elected officials. Rubrics guide you to other pages with names like Political Acts, Animal Farm, and Children of the Rich and Famous.

On the way to work one morning, ensnared in motionless traffic, you hear on the public radio station a report about an explosion at a sprawling garbage dump near Mexico City. Half a dozen are

killed, a score badly burned.

You ask yourself, "Why were those people living there?" You change stations and listen as a pair of morning DJ's belittle a young woman who has called in hoping to win a pair of tickets to a rock concert that will be held in a sports arena named after a biotechnology firm.

These events are remote, occurring outside the visible spectrum of your narrow existence and often taking place at a great distance from where you live. You learn about them one way or another, then attempt to reforge a link to the things with which you are familiar, to get back to what you know and understand. You glimpse only snippets of this other, alien world and a small voice inside you says, "This will never happen to me." You are comforted by this voice, but not convinced.

There are times, however, when something occurs on a personal level, an event, though small, which is equally incomprehensible, apparently random, and often not without tragic consequences. Something incoherent converges with your life and you try to bring it into focus, to make it part of the world you recognize.

My wife, my beautiful wife, frequently had to work late.

Beth was the love of my life. I knew the instant I first saw her.

Translucent blue-gray eyes, fair-haired. A rounded face with high cheekbones and a smooth, summery complexion. Small-breasted and long-limbed. She was quiet with a radiant smile. A joyous laugh made her appear far more outgoing than her initial, almost somber, reserve led people to believe. I fell in love with her on a bright, blue day in May with massive cottony thunderheads swelling in the southern sky.

Following graduate school, we married and I believed then, as now, that I had married for life. I have always been old-fashioned.

Her late nights at the office were something to which I had grown accustomed.

"What are you doing?" she asked one evening after I had picked up the phone.

"Not much," I said. "Just fooling around on the internet." I had been reading a news article about a ship with 200 children on it. The children had been sold into slavery. The ship was seeking to find

rabbit, an
1, to give

“Don’t tell me,” I said. “How late?”

“Who knows?”

I offered to make her dinner. “You can heat it up when you get home.”

“Don’t bother,” she said. “We’ve already ordered something.”

Right before she hung up she said, “No need to wait up.”

Into the dull hum of the handset I said, “Goodbye.”

She was busy, distracted -- a hundred things to do -- I understood.

I placed the phone back on its cradle, then checked the e-mails one last time before preparing my solitary dinner and that’s when I discovered it.

There was an e-mail from someone whose name I did not recognize. The space under “Subject” had been left blank. I opened it and saw that it was addressed to my wife.

I read it.

It was signed by someone named James Hudson, a name that meant nothing to me. He had sent it, I assumed, from where he was employed; his return address was in care of Unibanc.com. It was addressed to my wife at work, but, as were all e-mails that were sent to her there, it had also been forwarded here, to our home computer.

I read it again. It wasn’t very long.

It was a love letter, carefully written, not too effusive. I guessed that James was a bit wary to expose too much of himself as he sat at his glowing monitor at the bank, sat behind his cluttered desk in his darkened cubby after everyone had left at the end of a long day. I imagined him alone but still a little fearful that someone might come up from behind and catch him.

I read it a third time, making sure I understood what was being said. I could make sense of the words as individual units of meaning, but I was unable to grasp their significance within a larger scheme.

My breathing was altered. My heart thudding violently, my viscera hollow, my limbs weak. I lost my appetite.

I said, aloud, to no one, “My wife is having an affair,” and still I could not believe it.

•

At breakfast the next morning I said to her, “Did you see this about the ferry capsizing in a storm in the Philippines?” I showed her the newspaper. “Look, there’s a picture.”

She glanced with interest at the grainy photograph and asked me to pass her the raspberry jam.

“Defective life jackets,” she said.

“Seventy-two people still missing...”

“Safety inspectors taking bribes...”

I wanted to ask, “What time did you get in last night?” but I didn’t. I already knew the answer and I was afraid that she might lie.

“Would you like some more coffee?” I asked. She nodded and she did not look at me. She continued reading an article in the business section on hoof and mouth disease that had attracted her attention.

I wanted to ask, “Are you having an affair?” but I wasn’t sure that I wanted to know the answer.

•
A word from James next arrived several days later.

If my wife found the e-mails first on her computer at work, and moved them out of the inbox into a different folder, they wouldn’t show up on the machine at home. I had left my office early one day and had opened this one before she had been able to get to it.

James was proposing that they meet for a cozy dinner that night at a quiet restaurant in the Quarter, a spot where she and I had sometimes gone.

“Let me guess,” I said to her when she phoned. We often communicated with an abbreviated grammar, our conversations stripped down to a code which contained meanings beyond the simple words spoken. Our gestures, intonations, and facial expressions were rife with signification.

She sighed. “I’ll be so glad when we’re through with this presentation.”

My wife attempted to manufacture demand; advertising.

She said, “I shouldn’t be too late.”

“Who’s the client?”

“It’s this new account we’re trying to get,” she said. “Unibanc.”

“Of course,” I said. “I think I’ve heard of them. Seen something on the internet.”

Beth said nothing.

“Branches all over town.” I spoke in an different voice, one deep in the sonorous tones of sincerity. It was a voice that said I cared. “Branches all over the world.” I paused for emphasis, then said portentously, “Unibanc.”

Silence.

“Beth?”

“I was just thinking about what you said.” She hesitated. “That’s not bad.”

“Feel free.”

•

I toiled as an engineer. I performed manifold and complex structural calculations to establish the depth of beams, the size and spacing of columns, the thickness of walls. The determinations that I made decide whether a building stands up or falls down. It was important work, significant work with an impact on public safety. It was unceasingly repetitive and unendurably dull.

•

Over the next several days, I tracked the one-sided electronic correspondence. Because of the increasingly hectic pace that Beth was forced to follow, e-mails were ending up on the machine at home. Conferences in and out of the office kept her away from her desk. More and more she was compelled to stay late.

Their relationship burgeoned. Dinners were scheduled; assignations arranged. James gave the names of restaurants and motor hotels, addresses. He spoke wistfully about the two of them moving to Los Angeles.

My wife’s agency, Barnard & Cicero, was a small, aggressive firm that took pride in their novel creative efforts, their edginess, their willingness to think outside the box. They won the Unibanc account with a campaign proposal that was relentlessly conservative.

•

There was no surcease. Immediately Beth began to prepare for the first commercial. Her late nights at the agency continued.

“I might have to go to L.A. for a few days,” she said. “With the clients.”

“Really,” I said. “Unibanc?”

She explained to me that they were considering the possibility of doing an animated spot. The animation studio was in Los Angeles.

“You know when?”

“Couple of weeks.”

I began to plot.

I have read somewhere that all plots lead toward murder.

•

In the evenings while Beth labored, I went to libraries to do my research -- never the same branch twice -- using their computers to go online. “Fake I.D.” got the ball rolling. From one site I found a place to order template software to create a Mississippi driver’s license. I chose the name of Homer Horace Weed, having come across this name in the Pascagoula telephone directory at the library. From a different site I was able to obtain a Social Security card in that name.

I always paid in cash with worn one-dollar bills. I bought my postage stamps from a vending machine near the front door of an old hardware store on tree-lined Magazine where I often went to purchase twine and tape and nails. Letters were posted in dark blue mail boxes on the street, never the ones at the post office.

I did not use the telephone, nor did I use my own computer for these searches. Everything was mailed in Weed’s name to a vacant apartment in a building that I knew about.

I went to a used clothing store on Dryades. I browsed, walking happily through the poorly lit store, breathing in the rich aroma, an overpowering blend of sweat and mildew and tobacco smoke. I selected carefully. I bought H. H. a pair of dark slacks in a sensible medium weight fabric, a flannel shirt in subdued hues, shoes, a short khaki jacket with an elastic waistband and a well-used wallet. This last item had old business cards and photos still in it, as well as tiny scraps of folded paper with illegible writing on them. A trench coat caught my eye. Near the register a rotating display stand with hats on it. A soiled red mesh cap that had the words “Wayne Feeds” embroidered on a rectangular patch sewn to the front of it stood out.

I would dispose of all of these things later.

•

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g finally

at a impressive, believable patina. The Social Security card was dampened and placed inside the wallet that I had bought, then put in the oven at low heat. The card was remoistened as necessary. In only a few days it looked terrible, just like my own.

•

I took advantage of the time that Beth was in Los Angeles. I suggested that, even though her meetings would be finished on Friday, she should stay over the weekend.

“Relax,” I said. “Enjoy yourself.”

She agreed eagerly.

I arranged to take a day off on the Wednesday while she was gone. After sleeping late that morning, I dressed leisurely as H. H. Weed and took the coast road to Pascagoula. It was a pleasant, sunny trip.

In Biloxi I stopped for lunch in a glass-walled seafood restaurant that faced the glistening waters of the Gulf of Mexico. A great many pickup trucks filled the parking lot and a fishing boat was aground in the front yard. On the walls of the restaurant were framed black and white photographs depicting the ravages of Hurricane Camille.

After lunch I continued my drive past the resort hotels and casinos and the large, tall old houses built behind deep lawns lined with towering oaks. In gritty, industrial Pascagoula I pulled into a sparkling white service station for gas and directions. Across the street at a conveniently located supermarket, I purchased a pair of plastic framed reading glasses with a weak diopter.

Minutes later, I parked in the vast, freshly repaved parking lot at Hyper-Mart. Several recreational vehicles were camped on the perimeter of the lot. People sat in plastic chairs underneath roll-up awnings near their motor-homes. Some played cards, others read, a few napped. Televisions on plastic milk crates were tuned to informative broadcasts -- talk shows. Nearby, small children played with a beach ball. I parked a short distance from them, only about a quarter mile from the front door.

I ambled across the smooth, black surface, toward the low glass doors at the entry. Bright white lines, recently repainted, logically delineated the parking spaces. The warm, humid air was redolent with the tangy aroma of young asphalt. Upon my arrival the door swung open automatically and I entered the tall-ceilinged store. The gleaming aisles beckoned and my shopping spree began.

My cart filled with wonderful things, two polyester fiberfill pillows and snowy white pillowcases, a pair of paperback novels from the literature section, household cleansers, toilet paper, many other

useful items.

The hunting department loomed. Locked away in a long glass case illuminated with slender flickering fluorescent tubes, I beheld what I had come for.

Handguns.

They were arrayed in neat, carefully aligned rows with the model loftily exhibited in an open box on the top of its stack. I inspected the merchandise, my eye drawn to the colorful boxes, the shining steel, and I caught the attention of a salesman. He wore a black vest with a name badge -- "Hi, my name is Vern" -- several smaller badges and cloisonné pins.

While we talked, I cleaned my reading glasses with my handkerchief, breathing vapor onto the lenses for added authenticity. I fitted the glasses back onto my nose and adjusted them purposefully and again bent down to admire the display of armaments.

I chose a Colt M1991A1. I held the no-nonsense .45 in my hand, assessed its not unsubstantial weight, discovering how well it fit the hand, noting with approval its craftsmanship. I pulled the slide back and felt the clean, solid snap as the firing mechanism locked into position. I clicked the safety off and on, off and on. I squeezed the trigger and I was thrilled to hear the quick, reassuring sound the action made as the hammer slammed home. It was well-made, an object of substance.

I showed my driver's license; Vern gave it not a second glance. I completed a simple form. For employer I neatly printed "unemployable" and under home telephone I wrote "disconnect." I proffered my Social Security card.

"Oh, I don't need that," he said. "Only the number."

I paid cash, nothing larger than a twenty.

The pistol was irresistible in its stunning stainless steel finish. This, I knew, was a waste of money, for I would be using it only once and then tossing it into the brackish waters of Lake Pontchartrain. It came in an attractive box with a picture of the firearm printed on it and with a small star spangled elliptical sticker in one corner which read "Proudly Made in the USA." The salesman placed the box and the low velocity ammunition that he recommended into a large white reusable plastic shopping

pi." He
up over

at Mobile this weekend. At the gun show.”

He treated my question as if it were usual, ordinary, something that occurred regularly within the scope of his daily routine. It was as if I had asked him where the men’s room was.

“You’ll need a threaded barrel, though.”

I looked at him. I knew I appeared confused.

“A threaded barrel,” he pointed toward the shopping bag. He made a motion mimicking screwing something together. “To accept the silencer.”

“Of course,” I said.

He went on to explain that he was sure I could get one of those in Mobile as well.

I smiled, nodded and thanked him. I appreciated this friendly complicity, an unexpressed but palpable understanding that existed between those who sold guns and those that bought them.

On Saturday in Mobile, I bought an AWC Nexus sound and signature suppressor and a threaded barrel for the Colt from a soft-spoken older gentleman with very good manners who showed me snapshots of his grandchildren. He demonstrated for me how everything fit together.

•

It was a wet Monday in October, a bank holiday. Beth had been back from Los Angeles for a few weeks. Her late nights away from home had become less frequent, but had not altogether disappeared.

At lunchtime I called my wife at her office and was told what I already knew, that she had gone out around eleven, would be gone a few hours. She had an appointment, the receptionist said.

“Oh? Okay,” I said.

The rain came down very hard that day and I drove slowly, cautiously, out Highway 61, careful to obey all traffic laws. I crossed the parish line and drove farther, leaving the old city behind me. On one side, Airline Highway was a tawdry assortment of topless bars, adult video outlets, and older motels and diners; on the other side, railroad tracks. A great number of tire stores and shops dedicated to the repair of automobiles served as infill between the establishments focusing on entertainment and hospitality.

I cruised past the motel several times. It was the same one where the popular and good-looking televangelist with a pompadour had been arrested with the teenage prostitute a few years ago, out near the airport. I recognized my wife’s car, the new black Mustang convertible she had recently purchased.

I parked my own on an adjacent side street and waited. The rain came down harder still. I reached

into the right pocket of my trench coat. I ran my fingers along the cool steel of the Colt, felt the long barrel of the silencer. I pulled it out, once more hefting its weight. It was significantly heavier with the silencer, but still surprisingly well balanced. I fiddled with the safety, off and on, off and on. Off. I pulled the slide back and let it spring forward and laid the pistol down on the passenger seat, covering it with a section of the Times-Picayune.

I picked up the front page and began to read a story about an atrocity committed by ethnic Albanian rebels against Macedonian security forces near the border with Kosovo. The action was a reprisal by the Albanians for an atrocity committed earlier in the week by Macedonian security forces.

I did not get to read much of the article.

The long slow moving freight approached from the west, about three hundred yards away when I first spotted it. When it was a little closer, I put the pistol back in my pocket, donned a pair of natty leather gloves, got out of my car and took the two pillows from the trunk, then walked around the corner into the parking lot of the motel. I held the fluffy pillows in front of my chest, positioning them to hide both the Colt with its long silencer and my hands. I bent forward a little at the waist, trying to keep the pillows from getting too wet.

I went down the covered walkway until I came to the door across from where the Mustang was parked. When the train was nearer, louder, I knocked.

A man's voice said, "Who is it?"

"I'm from the office. I've got the extra pillows you asked for."

The voice said something I could not understand, then I heard a woman laughing. The door ground on its hinges as it opened just a bit. Through the crack the man studied me, then moved away. With my shoulder I nudged the door open and entered the room. He was already reseated on the edge of the bed, angled slightly away from me, his head turned toward the television. He held the remote and was preoccupied with his hunt for something interesting. With my foot I gently kicked the door shut behind me and entered the room. The hiss of white noise between channels.

"Just leave them there," he said, waving toward a spot on the still made bed. He didn't turn to look

on capti-

tridency.
objects, as

if faintly haloed with vivid, vibrant light, stood out sharply from the background. I put the pillows down on the bed near where he was sitting and without hesitation I brought the end of the silencer's barrel to his temple in a deft movement and I whispered, "James." He turned his head reluctantly away from the screen, just a bit toward me, and I calmly squeezed the trigger back. A sound, pffft, somewhat like a sneeze that someone was trying to suppress. He slumped and fell back onto the bed. I glanced at the television, a daytime serialized drama in Spanish.

"What are you watching now?" said a woman's voice, viscous and slurred. Then she laughed.

She came out of the bathroom, rolling down her sleeve, and stopped in the dressing alcove. She looked at the inert figure on the bed, then at me; her face betrayed no surprise.

These events took only a fraction of a moment, but they seemed stretched out in time, appearing to extend over a far longer period. We looked at each other, her full, pretty lips parted, her mouth on the verge of speaking as I pulled the trigger with a compact motion.

On her clean white shirt, between her breasts, I watched grow larger the small red spot. It was then that I noticed her hair and I thought how odd that the same word should describe two colors so utterly different.

Slowly she began to fall, as if her body was forgetting how to stand.

•

That evening I was preparing dinner -- a succulent Atlantic salmon with asparagus and an endive salad with a balsamic vinaigrette and red wine dressing, and this bread I prepare that Beth loved with olive oil and sea salt and herbes de Provence -- listening to NPR, when my wife came home. I came up from behind her and I gave her a kiss on the neck and a gentle hug as she glanced through her mail that I had laid out on the dining room table. Without really paying attention, she sorted through the usual bills and requests for charitable contributions and the colorful flyers from the department stores and the wonderful offers of low interest rate credit cards. She seemed distracted, outside of herself.

"How was your day?" I asked.

She made some small inarticulate sound that I did not ask her to clarify. She laid the mail down.

"Were you listening to the radio when you drove home?"

She nodded. She stared down at the mail on the table, idly arranging the envelopes into a tidy stack.

"The story about the shooting at the motel on Airline Highway."

She turned to face me.

“Jimmy DeVoto,” I said. “The mobster.”

“Drug related,” my wife said dully, echoing what she had heard from the radio report. “That’s what the police say.”

“No sign of a struggle.” I watched her, hoping to determine something and she looked back at me. We had entered into a process. She was attempting to communicate something to me in an unspoken, yet unequivocal, fashion.

“Execution style,” she said. A nuanced eye movement, an arrested gesture made with her mouth. The very way she spoke. Her look said she knew.

A short beat.

“Also in the room was the body of an exotic dancer that Jimmy had been seeing.” She said this in a distant tone, as if repeating something she had memorized but did not understand, like words in an unknown foreign language.

“She performed at a nearby club.”

“Coco Wilde,” I said. “Evidence of drug use...”

“Heroin found in the room...”

“Jimmie was supplying her...”

“In exchange...”

“Those who knew her described her...”


“Natural redhead, always laughing. A good dancer.” She looked away from me. She was staring off, glancing over my left shoulder, her brow somewhat wrinkled. After a short while she turned back to look once more at me. “She had only met Jimmy recently.”

“The police have no leads.”

“No witnesses have come forward,” she said. We stared deep into each other’s eyes for a long time without saying anything.

“Dinner’s almost ready,” I said finally. “Are you hungry?”

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and gave



At dinner we talked about events of the day. I told her about an error our firm had made in some calculations concerning floor-to-floor heights in an office building and the consequent problems for ceiling clearances for mechanical systems. This was an expensive error that would cost someone his job.

“Everyone makes mistakes,” she said to me.

She then began to tell me excitedly about a new account that she would now be working on; Barnard & Cicero had won it from a much larger firm. An airline account, Avione.

I interrupted her. “Oh,” I said, also excited, “I heard something else on the radio.”

She looked at me with an inquisitive gaze.

“Branches all over town...” I said this in an altered voice, deep and sincere. We looked at each other and smiled.

“Branches all over the world...” she filled in ably.

Together we said in happy unison, “Unibanc.”

She reached across the table and gave my forearm a firm squeeze, just below the elbow, a familiar and encouraging gesture.

Thick Pulse (Drenched)

Swan

Those deep drums beat

beat

beat

on that dark dank

summer night

right through the sea breeze

and city streets

hovering heavily

in the uneasy stuck-still air

of her apartment

boom

boom

boom

She awoke with a sudden

jerk

a flood of sticky sweat

drip

drip

dripping

down

her

face

her bed shirt

a damp stifling thing

clinging tight to her smooth

young skin

her tongue dry paste

throb

throb

throb

the beat was in her pulse

thick passion

pushing

pumping

through her heart

and arms

and head

beat

boom

drip

throb

push

pump

What had it been?

Was some desire

or fear

or part of her

from the past

resurfacing,

beckoning for her

to come

out?

It was gone now

leaving her in its

aftermath

with a wet cold chill

and a racing mind

After pulling off

her smothering tangle

she lay naked with her window open

as the cool summer air

breathed over her

Fading into sleep,

the experience already reduced to a memory,

she wondered,

not for the first time,

if she had made too much

of a forgotten dream

or if she had just brushed

up against

a part

of her soul

that was

missing.

Ink.

Shannon Maraghy

I caught a glimpse of my reflection in the mirrored storefront of Subway as I hurried inside. Man, did I look that bad? Folds collecting under the eyes, and my skin looked actually gray. *To match the hair*, I told myself--well, what hair I had left. As if they heard me thinking about them, some of my hairs rose up in the breeze and waved at me in the glass as I walked quickly into the store. If Allen wants to me get lunch for everybody, he could have at least let me go on break early so I wouldn't spend my lunch waiting around Subway. I opened the notebook he had given me to the first page, where everyone had written their order. The early-twenties looking kid behind the counter was bent over an open sub roll, arranging cheese triangles on it, separating meat from its wax paper. He sprinkled shredded lettuce slowly, like fairy dust, over top the meat, and took a half-step back to admire his work. When he handed the sandwich to the lady in front of me, I saw he wore a button on his apron that declared him a "sandwich artist". Looked like he took that title pretty seriously. He glanced up.

"Help you?" he asked, and I saw his hooded eyes--he was pretty stoned. "Can I get these to go please?" I handed the notebook over to him. The sandwich artist squinted at the paper. He didn't have anybody helping him either. Great. I'd be here a while then. Last time I had smoked up was probably ten years ago--with Cathy and her sister and her sister Cammie's girlfriend Star. Cathy and I had just started dating at the time. Now Cammie and Star were married. But not to each other. Somehow, they had both ended up with husbands and children. And the most illicit substance Cathy would touch these days was an occasional ice cream sandwich.

There were five other people waiting to be helped when he finally said, "Here go." He handed over the four sandwiches.

"Thanks," I said, and my molars came together on a fold of mouth membrane. The pain jolted my mind awake. The blood bloomed metallic on the back of my tongue and salty on the tip.

I walked slowly back toward the office, lightly probing my cut cheek with my tongue. Beeping horns--cars communicating with each other in their separate voices. Birds too, talking to each other up on the telephone wires. I usually didn't notice them, though I supposed that they had always been there.

An old man with red eyes shuffled toward me, said, "Change."

"Sorry," I replied, kept walking. The tape of the rest of my day spooled out before me. When I returned to the office, I would distribute the sandwiches, give the receipt to Allen, eat my lunch, and then? Finish out the work day. Stimulate the keyboard with my fingers, feed paper to the fax, breathe into the telephone until five o'clock. Then go home to Cathy. As I fell asleep tonight, I wouldn't be able to remember what exactly I had done during the day, worked with numbers, yes--*It's all about the numbas baby!* I said in a gravelly voice and followed it up with a Cha-cha-cha! but what exactly I had done I wouldn't be able to remember. But that wasn't... something that was--important. I was distracted.

What was important? I asked myself the question, but myself wasn't really paying attention. Absently, myself responded with, *Something must be.* My main attention was on something else. Something was sparkling in my peripheral vision, to my left. I turned and looked.

I had been passing the entrance to an alley. This alley opened on both ends of the block, but it extended so far that the light entering from the other end was just a ray that sparkled white. That was what had caught my attention. Some sunlight filtered down from above, so it was dim but not dark. I turned into the alley; I was headed that way anyhow.

I walked for a few minutes, past spray-painted tags I couldn't read, past small noises that might have been made by roaches or beetles or rats, or maybe just by the settling into warm weather of the old brick buildings on both sides. Past decomposing cardboard boxes and erect hunks of metal, candy wrappers, malt liquor bottles, cigarette butts, some scattered Styrofoam "s"s, a condom, a pile of feces on newspaper with flies around it. The feces looked too large to have been made by any city animal other than a person. I was perhaps halfway through the alley. There was a mound of garbage against the brick on my left, but just beyond that--a rather clean looking spot. It suggested to me that I was tired, that I wouldn't mind resting for a while. Even more than that, I liked that there wasn't anybody else around. It hit me that this never happened. At home, there was always Cathy. At work, there were many people--in person, as well as disembodiedly--coming at me through the computer screen and the
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put down the bag of sandwiches. I reached into it and took out the one marked “turk/chez”. I unwrapped it and took a bite. Then I set it down on its paper on my lap and opened the notebook. It was brand new and unmarked in, except for the list of sandwiches on the first page. I ripped the list out, balled it up and threw it into a nearby trash can. I looked at the next page, the new first page of the notebook. *Tabula rasa*.

Looking at it, I wanted to try to write again. I wasn't sure what, just whatever would come into my mind. I thought that if I started, I would cover the page with words, turn it over, and keep on writing. I wanted to, but I didn't have a pen. I sighed. Just as well. The last time I had tried hadn't gone very well. I'd meant it to be a poem, but the harder I'd tried to put pictures into words, the stiffer it became. The next day I'd read over it, and it had bored and disgusted me by turns. A showcase for cliches, as usual. I was looking at the page, and I noticed something. Strange I hadn't noticed earlier.

Unlike any other notebook paper I could remember seeing, it was ruled with black lines instead of blue. The lines cut the white paper up into twenty-six bars. *Horizontal lines are supposed to create a feeling of calmness and security, whereas vertical and diagonal lines create a feeling of excitement and action.* I'd read that somewhere, but it didn't seem true. These horizontal lines did not make me feel calm. They seemed to unsettle the paper. They unsettled me, too. *It must be because I am used to the soft blue lines of most notebooks.* But that didn't seem true either.

My teeth kept chewing. My stomach was getting full, and I started to feel drowsy. I focused on a single black line, trying to pull it toward me, letting the white space above and below it recede. Then I focused on a bar of white space, trying to bring it forward and letting the black lines above and below it go backward and get fuzzy. Positive space becoming negative. And vice-versa. Wherever my eyes rested on the paper, they seemed to pull it forward a little. So that I could almost imagine the paper breathing with my aid of my eyes, exhaling wherever I looked. I bring the page to life. I breathed in and out in rhythm with the paper for a while. Nice. My lunch break was probably just about over. I closed my eyes for a moment.

I opened them. It was dark, but I knew where I was, still in a sitting position. I seized my wrist with my hand and pressed the button on my watch to light it up. 5:45! The office was closed. Work would have wondered why I never came back, with or without the sandwiches. I stood up. My ass was sore and cold. My back was stiff. I swivelled my head, shaking off sleep, trying to see. I could tell which

way I should go to get out of the alley because a little light from a streetlamp picked out the corner edges of the building at the alley opening. My eyes adjusted and I could see just a little. I took a few steps in that direction, but my foot hit something, and I shouted, grabbing the brick to keep from going down.

Hold up. Calm down. *Inhale*. I noticed how cool and damp the air was--not like evening air... More like morning air. I looked toward the direction I figured was east, and there was a glowing sore on the sky. Fuck. I stood still and let it sink in, just how stupid I was. I had slept like a happy idiot through the afternoon and night, sitting on cold concrete in an alley. I could have, and really should have, been mugged, beaten up, raped even. At least bitten by a rabid rat. But I had my watch. Did I still have wallet? I patted myself down. Yeah, there it was in my pants pocket. My clothes were zipped up, buttoned up, tucked in. My asshole felt untampered with. I felt, in all ways, intact. But something else was wrong, I began to realize as light started taking over the sky.

I had fallen asleep with my back propped against the brick wall next to the trash heap. The concrete of the alley had all been all one level the day before. I knew this. I was certain. But now? I was standing in a concrete square that was maybe five feet by five feet, and that square was sunken about a foot below the level of the rest of the alley. The hard thing my foot had struck against was the side of this depression in which I was standing.

I searched for an explanation. I was still asleep, and I was dreaming. I pinched myself. Nothing. Maybe I had sleepwalked to another place in the alley, maybe to another alley altogether. I had never sleepwalked before, though--not that I knew of. Someone had moved me? I'd been drugged--something in the sandwich which lay only half-eaten next to me on its paper? Would that boy from Subway want to do that to me? No, why would he? Paranoid--crazy. Could I be? How would I know? Or maybe that was the point--I wouldn't.

I let a few more minutes pass as I thought, and I began to calm down. I was pretty sure that none of my rationalizations was the case. Nothing was wrong with me--physically or mentally. Aside from being sore and stiff and confused, I felt great, actually. Better than I had in a long time. I filled my

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I went to work. That's all. Sleep as late as possible--I was always tired--then go to work. Fact, that's probably why I had slept here so long. I'd been real tired, and there wasn't any alarm clock here to wake me up.

I knew I wouldn't be fired if I went to work when they opened in a little while and offered an apology and some explanation. But I didn't want to. Why should I then, I asked myself. I looked down at my feet, boxed in shadow beneath the level of the alley. I couldn't think of a really good reason. Why not just not go back then? Quit.

Okay, I thought. Okay, I wouldn't go back. I had decided it, and I started to feel really happy.

I began to think that, feeling the way I did, I shouldn't worry about this pit that had formed around me. It was an occurrence that could not be explained (not by me anyway), but just because nothing else like it had ever happened to me didn't mean that it was impossible, or that there was any reason why it shouldn't happen to me.

It made me think of high school chemistry class, Mr. Jenkins, Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle--how all we know of the motion of atoms and molecules could be wrong. When we observe matter, we look at it in the light. But maybe the light causes the matter to behave differently than it would without light's interference. A person was visible for a few seconds as they passed by the opening of the alley in the distance. Maybe light is an extra variable, screwing up every experiment. If we could only watch matter in light's absence, we might be able to know the truth.

Heisenberg's Principle. Maybe it applied to life in general. Maybe sometimes you needed to examine life in the absence of the light of the "rational" in order to find the truth. It seemed valid. I owed it to science and, more importantly, to myself not to dismiss this pit as "impossible" or myself as "crazy", but to study the circumstances with an open mind and see what, if anything, would happen next. Besides, I felt too good. I sat down again.

The sky was light now, and I could see that the sides of this pit appeared to be made of marble--white marble with veins of black running through it. Curiouser and curiouser. I picked up where I had left off on the sandwich the night before, opening it up and checking it first for bugs or tiny gnat marks. I didn't see any. I fixed my eyes to the walls of the pit. There was a gob of mustard coming out the side of the sandwich. I caught it on the tip of my finger and smeared it on the wall in a line that stretched from the bottom of the pit up the wall to the top, where the pit met with the level of the

alley. I figured that now I would be able to tell if the square I was sitting in sank any deeper.

I thought about Cathy, and my stomach felt tight. I realized that I didn't feel like going home to my wife in the same way that I hadn't felt like returning to work the previous day. She was, no doubt, very upset that I had not come home last night. I pictured the scene that would ensue when I returned home. I had a feeling that she wouldn't understand my need to examine my situation out of the light of rationality. She would ask me question after question about where I'd been all night and with whom. Why was my suit wrinkled and didn't I have the decency to call? Sorry wouldn't be good enough. Did I realize that she had stayed awake all night worrying, wondering if she should call the police and the hospitals? There was someone else, wasn't there? Why didn't I love her anymore--

No, I didn't feel like going home to that right now. I didn't want to think about it either. It made me feel nauseous. All that would be waiting for me when I went home. Right now, I felt good. Alive. And I wanted to stay here long enough to see what would happen. This was the first thing that I had really wanted to do for some time. And I was doing it. I was staying until I felt like leaving. Until I had discovered the nature of this pit.

But I wondered how long that would take. I watched a beetle walk slowly and lopsidedly toward me from a pile of trash. What if the pit had stabilized itself at one foot deep and there would be nothing else to see? Maybe I would sit here all day without result. But whoever had relieved themselves on the newspaper might come back--a homeless who might know something. I could ask. I had some money, if he or she wasn't too crazy. Well, I thought, I would see. The beetle paused a few inches from my thigh, antennae twitching, like she was looking at me. No, we would see, she seemed to say.

I finished my sandwich and glanced at the mustard strip. It still extended the full height of the wall. Of course, I told myself. I hadn't felt any movement. I leaned back against the wall in the corner and rested my right arm outside the pit, on the concrete of the alley. My friend hurried into a crack between the bricks of the building. White and black marble grayed together in front of me.

My arm hurt. When I opened my eyes, I saw why. The pit had deepened as I slept. Now, my arm,
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the wall. I made it to my feet. It was more difficult this time; my body had been in a sitting position for so long. The walls came up almost to my waist. I felt somewhat light-headed. Was I standing on a platform in a shaft of marble, my weight causing the platform to descend into the shaft? Or was I standing on the roof of a strange elevator that was going down? Either way, I had to empty my bowels. Now. I grabbed some napkins that had come with my sandwich and climbed out of the pit with the thought that if I stayed much longer or fell asleep again, the option to climb out might no longer be available to me. I had to leave now, if I was leaving. Silently commanding my colon to hold on, I took a last look at the veins of the marble, the contrast of the black and the white. The white was calm and creamy, and the veins moved freely through it. They twisted through like rivulets from a toppled pot of old-fashioned ink on thick paper. I squatted next to the garbage pile and breathed with physical relief as my abdomen lightened. I knew for sure now that the pit was deepening, but I still didn't know why or what the significance of it was.

Cathy would think I was crazy for sleeping in an alley, or she would think I was lying. She would cry and call me insensitive for worrying her. I didn't want to think about what she would say when I told I wasn't going back to work.

I walked away from the pit, but I realized I didn't have the notebook. Not that I needed it for anything really. It didn't have any important information in it. I didn't think it had any information in it. But I wanted it. I approached the pit again and looked down. It was leaning up against the wall, next to the bags of sandwiches, its white cover blending in somewhat with the marble. Now that I had decided to quit my job, I could try to write again. I wanted to try in that notebook. I might never see a notebook like that again, ruled with black lines. It was attractive to me. I thought maybe I could write on those black lines. This could be the start of a new kind of life for me, and I wanted to get started on it today. I would go to a café or diner, order some coffee or maybe scotch, and see what I could do. I would call Cathy when I was done.

I blinked. Had the pit gotten deeper, I wondered? I couldn't tell.

I crouched down and put a hand on the edge of the pit. I hopped in. As my feet connected with its bottom, I heard a groaning noise, and I knew. A part of me had known that it could happen. Momentum traveled down through my bent knees, my feet, the soles of my leather shoes, and caused something to give way. The platform was in motion. I was going down. There was a scraping of stone against stone as it heaved. One side of the platform was tilted down as it fell, but then it must have

caught on something--jarring the platform, and throwing me against the wall of the shaft. It started to slow down, but then the other side of the platform dropped, and it continued to fall. I fell down against the shifting platform and stayed there, waiting for it to overturn. I pictured it dropping me into a shaft below it. I would fall for a while. And then, I would hit bottom, and the stone platform would come down on top of me.

I shut my eyes and saw vertical lines etching themselves on the backs of my eyelids. I entertained a thought of the feeling vertical lines are supposed to create. I noticed that I wasn't screaming. I thought that I probably should.

I couldn't tell if I was still falling, and I opened my eyes. I was, but the platform remained more or less horizontal beneath me, scraping against the four walls that were growing quickly up around me toward the shrinking square of light above. The platform was slowing down. And after a long time, it finally stopped altogether. I waited almost a minute, barely breathing, to be sure that it was not just momentarily stuck on something.

I looked up. A long tunnel of marble stretched above my head, ending in a small patch of light. I took a look around my five by five area. I still had the sandwiches, smooshed and banged up though they were, and the notebook. That notebook--the reason why I was now trapped down here. It was darker down here, but not too dark for me to see that the marble walls down here looked different. They were far more riddled with veins than the marble at the top of the pit had been. My shoulder hurt from where I'd been thrown against the side of the pit. I looked up again and tried to hear anything. I cupped my mouth and yelled up for help. There would have to be footsteps or voices in the alley eventually. The person who'd shat. Someone who'd heard the loud scraping noise and my yelling. I waited. I watched the square of light get dimmer and then disappear finally as it became nighttime. I didn't hear anybody come through the alley. I thought, I'm down here by myself in the dark. I whispered the words to myself. "Down here. By myself. In the dark." I ran the it all together, making it sound like a limerick, "Downherebymyselfinthedark." Anything to keep myself from thinking about what the words actually meant. Dow Near Bymys Elfin Thed Ark. Keep the panic from growing and

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fully in what I judged to be the lowest corner of the platform, so that the pool wouldn't run back to where I was sitting. I was tired, but I didn't want to sleep, afraid that I wouldn't hear it if someone came into the alley.

Dawn. This time, my view of the sky was limited to the small square above me. But it was the second sunrise I had seen in two days now. "I'm an old hand with this sunrise business now!" I said and laughed out loud. I wondered how many more sunrises I would watch from down here. My eyes were tired of being open. My shoulder was sore. My jaw hurt from fusing my teeth together for so long. The ache where tooth forced against tooth into bone, against muscle and nerve, into the brain. My brain ached from the pressure. The smell of my own ammonia was strong. And I was beginning to get really thirsty.

With the morning light, I could see the marble again. It was mostly black. There were more veins than whiteness on the walls down here. A web of vines choking out the wall. A mass of tangled electrical cords, tingling with electric impulse. A pile of vipers, slithering over each other in the sand. Veins, vines, vipers--vain, I thought, and pressed my forehead against the marble. Oh! My eyelids snapped open wide.

Oh. The stone was cool, and it felt nice on my forehead and eyelids. Its hardness was good too, the way it didn't yield as I rested on it. I breathed out slowly. Then in. This stone was strong. Probably because of all those fat blood vessels. Blood brings oxygen and nourishment. Good circulation is essential for strength.

But with all that blood just beneath the surface, why was the marble so cool? I considered, rolling my face and neck slowly against it. Because the blood was black. Of course--I was used to red blood, which was hot. But apparently, black blood was cold. Maybe if my blood were black like that, maybe I would be strong and cool too. My brain was humming.

I wondered if there were food coloring companies that made black food coloring. I couldn't remember ever having seen it. And if so, how much would one have to inject in order to bleed black? Maybe one could use enough blue and yellow food coloring that it would mix with the red of the blood to make black. Experimentation would be necessary.

I pressed my lips to the marble. That was good too. My mouth was touching one of the thick veins, and I decided to cool my tongue on it. I opened my mouth a little, and pressed my tongue slowly against the marble. It did feel nice. Refreshing, like iced tea on a sweaty hot day. I licked a little. Mmm.

A little more. There was a lot of saliva in my mouth. Whoa, a whole lot--some almost spilled out. I put my mouth securely on the stone and sucked very gently. I stroked myself as I worked at the wall. At first lightly--it might have been an accidental brushing of myself with my hand. I thought of black blood rushing forth from the wall into my mouth, smelling like ink, me swallowing it. My brain was hot and tingly, and I was sweating. I could smell my body's smell, and there was another smell too. My hand was working very deliberately now. I kept my mouth and tongue moving against the wall. The smell of ink in my nose and the taste of ink in my mouth. I had always liked the smell of ink, but I wouldn't have thought I would enjoy the taste. Not like this. My mouth was still full. I relaxed the muscles and my chin was wet, and the front of my shirt. It was too much for me; I came hard, eyes closed, and it was ten minutes before the reality of my situation came back to me. Where I was. I kept my eyes closed against it.

My chest felt wet. It was strange that I had worked up that much wetness--saliva and sweat. I mean, I knew I had been more excited than usual. Fear has that effect on me. It builds tension; tension builds arousal. And when that tension is finally and physically released... But my chest was really wet. I put my hand on my front. The texture of the wetness wasn't like saliva or sweat. It felt velvety. Then I realized that I was still smelling ink. It hadn't been just a weird sex fantasy thing. It smelled like ink down here. Now I finally opened my eyes. Yeah, the front of my shirt was black. My mouth tasted of ink too. I gathered some saliva in my mouth and let it stream into the palm of my clean hand. A black pool with shiny black spit bubbles. I looked at the marble, expecting it to have a hole in it, leaking ink--but it looked as it had before. Smooth and hard, unmarred. I touched it, and it felt like it looked, but when I pulled my hand back, I saw that I had smeared ink on it. I looked at my inky hands. Watching as I shifted my palm, shifting the reflections of the light off the ink--I found I was still excited. I put my hands there. The ink had a pleasing degree of viscosity.

When I finished, I was exhausted. I stretched myself out diagonally on the platform and fell asleep.

I awoke to find myself deeper down, and cold. What had been the small square of light above was
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Principle. Even if it were the same in the light, would it still be the same now in the dark?

I touched the marble, though I was a bit embarrassed. I had pleased myself before it twice. It was firm as always, resolute. The strength of it reassured me. I relaxed my body against the wall. It was colder, though--this could be because we were deeper under ground. Or, it could mean that the marble down here was all veins with no white to it. There was no way of knowing.

I still tried to listen for human noises from above, but I couldn't hear anything at all. It was completely quiet. I realized I was left with three senses--smell, touch, and taste. Smelling was unsavory. I had used the bathroom a few times in the corner now, using Subway napkins for toilet paper. But, if yesterday were any indication, touching and tasting were very pleasurable.

I ran my fingers lightly along the surface of the wall and thought I felt something in one area. I tried again, and found I was not mistaken. I detected a faint pulse, which struck me as female, probably because it was turning me on incredibly. I began to kiss and probe with my tongue. I tried sucking and licking in a variety of ways in order to please her. I varied the pressure and the movements, as I slid my hands over her smooth body. When she gave up her blood to my mouth, I could feel her quivering. So I knew she liked it as much as I did. Her blood in my mouth tasted inky, as before. We both relaxed. I lay against her, thinking.

She and I were lovers. A man and the walls that surrounded him--it sounded strange, I had to admit. But I had been determined to discover the nature of the pit, and now I knew. I realized I felt unlonely with her, which was surprising, because I hadn't realized I'd been lonely before, despite all the people that were always around me.

Cathy's face flashed in my mind, but disconnectedly, making me feel nothing. Her face was part of everything else up there, everything that existed above this pit and beyond the alley. It's funny how quickly things can change.

I opened my eyes, and the pinpoint of light above was gone. I didn't know if that meant that it was night-time, or if I had descended too deeply into the pit to be able to see any sky at all. Not that I really cared. I spent my hours just being with her, and I was content. The only times I took my attention off her were when I used the bathroom and ate the last sandwich. I washed it down with inky blood, which took care of my thirst. Time passed, and I never saw the any light above, so I guessed I had been pretty much swallowed by the walls of the pit. When I got hungry later, I relied completely

on her fluid for nourishment. The marble fed me like a baby, until I was full.

As my diet began to consist entirely of marble blood, I found I didn't need to excrete any longer. That made me really happy. The smell in the corner wouldn't be getting any worse. But also, I reasoned that my body must have been absorbing it. I hoped the blackness had made its way through my digestive tract into my circulatory system. I wanted to know, though. So I unwound the wire from the top of my spiral notebook and bent it back and forth until it broke off. I ran the end along my arm until the skin gave way. In the dark, I sucked at my own arm. The taste I got was not metallic and salty like when I bit my cheek inside the Subway. How many days ago was that? I couldn't remember, but the number was not important. What was important? Yes, the taste of my blood now was inky like hers. I pressed my cut arm against her and felt the liquid flow back and forth between us. And I felt really sure for the first time in my life. I didn't feel like the human being I had been before-uncertain and unsatisfied, red-blooded.

I felt really ready to write now. I had everything I needed. Paper--the special notebook that was responsible for me being here. Pen, too--the straightened end of the wire that had bound the notebook together. Together, the walls and I had plenty of ink and time for writing. The first thing we wrote would have to be about us. After that, we would see what we came up with. Dipping my pen alternately into my own blood and into hers, I began to write, trying to print the letters somewhat legibly, but not worrying about it too much. Who was going to read it anyway?

Perimeter

Wynn Yarbrough

"The suburbs have no chance to soothe the restless dreams of youth."

Geddy Lee

At the hemlines of the city, kids plow through the six thousand bottles and bake themselves to royalty under the toying gaze of moonshine.

Those hurt most are in protest. They light the fences on fire and lean away from the flames. The orbit of the dispossessed is the very limits of the distressed young. On that gravely path are the possibilities of a second coming, the loveliest roses of our nature, the courageous lonely walks silenced until a thousand voices clamor to have witnessed a miracle.

1979 A.D. by my psychiatrist

from Michael J. Menges

Like mules (no, not asses) of clay-house desert times
Stamping grapes into wine, I wearily and free-will-lessly move paper
And stamp my dreams and dignity deep underfoot while a
Crimson-purple face barks out obscenities as if I were an
Ass and he the wagonmaster. The load (workload, that is) is too heavy and
Feed and barn too little for my collapsing strength.
Restaurant grease and a hotel closet hurt and oppress my elbow-room need and
Hurtle me trudging to the Club to act and feel my muscles' power for me alone, not for that shithead.

Girls fast as cheetahs dashing for deer fattened up by the Pharaoh,
Shying away from hide-worn (like my wallet) mules like me,
Richly dress in royal gaudy trappings and talking in gaudy rich voices,
Clothes strolling couples communicate in Tower-of-Bable words and in
Comic-strip balloons that pop at my understanding attempts,
I, in my faded holey shreds am watching plays and performances
In dialects I cannot grasp, so on to the club for that which I can grasp.
Trudging back I transmute to invisible lizard from an eons-aged star,
Seeing creatures from another orb prepare for mating with
Left hooks and right jabs, sabred thrusts and counterthrusts
From language and posture and gesture, and I imagine my fellow and feline
Lizards, without all distraction, hostile and relating-destructive or vain and strutting, and wriggling and swaggering,
Look speechless with tongues only jumping as signal and then mate,
All words that suck emotion and joyous anticipating heartbeat all disappeared.

Poor boss! So much blood-torment overflowing under his skin;
The dikes of his nerves must have swept away Poor boss!!

At overtime tonight I will give him a tranquilizer pellet
 To help him bring in the weekend and he can ring out the old,
 And I will bring in the new.

Those nags and insults and disgust-contempt-tones in his voice,
 Aimed seemingly at me but springing, I know, from his sympathizable rage,
 (and I should feel with compassion so the earthlings tell me),
 Will be silenced. The gun club sells excellent silencers,
 And his problem of excess blood will be solved by a drainage canal the pellet will make.

Between two pueblos lies the slave auction, Nevada meeting Athens,
 Across the barking iron-housed-chariot path stands a
 Burned out 3-level-caved mountain-like me but I am not insured.
 The top caverroom will be a perfect observation for me to watch the
 Earthlings from the YMCA and Girls' Club bid for bodies at the neighborhood bar
 While the auctioneers serve the liquid advertisements. The sight from my telescope is adequate, but
 Closer inspection from my lizard superiors is demanded to gauge the life form's habits,
 So I launch my own miniature satellites to penetrate the smoggy atmosphere,
 Small round cylindrical satellites
 From the National Rifle Club's collection of miniature Cape Canaveral sets.

To mix cake batter is so strenuous,
 To spin the guts and head to
 suicide is also taxing,
 We pay taxes for the police so
 let them serve me--do an
 electric mixer job with more efficiency.

When I fly, last-laughingly,
 to report, not to superiors (my shrink says
 they are delusional and hallucinatory but
 what does he know? That's why I fired
 him. I haven't taken his pills in weeks)
 But to God, or void, I'll say,
 "Cart to auto, cave to mansion,
 Progress has changed but roots of
 Discontent, rebellion, power, pain, and
 suffering have not been altered."

High School Beating

Wynn Yarbrou

There is nothing
solid in the wall
if the ringing of the bell
lasts longer
than her body
sailing in mid-air
and her landing
by the sink.
When she spit
in his face,
flashed her teeth
through a tirade
of venom,
he baptized her
so hard
she forgot her name.

His first shot
wasn't to the face.
He didn't smear
her white plaster face
or split her lip or
install a new set of rings
around her
sleepless eyes.

He pulled underneath
his body, dug deep
into a barren well,
planted his feet firmly
and, with an undercut,
pushed her untethered belly
against the spines
of her ribs.

So tough, she
laughed until
he kned her skull
against the wall,
cracking her head.
The last bit
of fantastic, red
love spilling
down her perfect
cleavage. Then he went
to his corner, shaking
his head, with a sigh,
undeniably cleansed:
waiting for the
next round.

ELEVEN MILLION HUMAN BEINGS

Wayne Ray

When you opened the restaurant door
and entered the almost empty room,
I could feel the winds of war,
a death draft, doom.
Your life has been the pits,
leading us all to believe it was
only the Jews who died at Auschwitz.
Do your history books not include:
those passing into senility or
those of mental tranquility or
ordinary Poles or Negroes or Commies too,
Ukrainians or Slavs or political dissidents or
non Aryan aliens and gays or
does your book only list Jews?
Six million went up in smoke!
You think the other five million were a joke?
It was my father's army that liberated Auschwitz
but do I flaunt his medals
upon my chest in front of you?
Don't dump your holocaust on my plate,
there really is no one left alive
for you to hate.

Helmet lockjawed tight, glued armor rattling,
He struggled and staggered and tripped battling
His stifled weight. I said, "I know
Gloom and sadness
Is your metal suit. Heed!
Madness
Will drag you flat!" I whipped my Christian sword
And my Buddhist blade, and moved toward
My liberating goal, Pushing him down,
My Buddhist blade moving skilled like a clown,
In the armor's cracks slit, and off the steel
And arms' flesh split. "Soon now you will feel real!"
I cried and folded his hands
And hacksawed
"Tween gloves and mail. The Christian sword so awed
Him that he dropped a prickly scream. My Peale
Yes-Thinking cutlass with my normal zeal
Slashed through his helmet and scraped out his eyes.
My tropic syringe slipped, despite his gasps,
Through tiny slits forced his mouth just to rasp.
My psycho-therapier to his chest,
Darting under his breastplate, snagged his pest.
A furry, small rodent, branded Ego
Was speared bloody dead. I said, "I must go!?"

Self-Helpless

Michael J. Menges

Side Effects

Michael J. Menges

Watching Mannix blast down the heavy,

And I, feeling down and heavy and
waiting to be blasted

(But I am a Man and won't be nixed--

Nix on Nixon my spinning crazy
Memory recalls grafitti nonsense),

Wonder if bullet holes burn with
the same temperature as mine will.

Body-healing (I think, but am not sure)
Smokescreen-words (jargon, shit) calls it
side Effects, but
All over my interior, cavernous and
hollow, not just my side (or sides),

Fire (effects? agony! another smokescreen
outer, not inner I mean) blazes

Along yellow lines I bitter laughingly
call my nerve-remnants (like dead
cockroach bodies)

Muscles tense, like knotted ropes
ripped as two war ships play anchor-
line tug-of-war,

And my groin hollers as if a
huge crab is pinching my legs,

Sweat Showers me, non-comforting,
neither sweltering sleepy sweat nor
air-condition office to sun-shower sweat,

But ice-cuby interior-tremble-forcing
expire-fearing perspiration drips
and horrifies.

Miserable paradox! Outside cold
from inside heat. And my flesh
the wretched filter.

I sock the TV knob and kill
The announcer, as he intones,
"Richard Himble, convicted of a crime
he did not commit...", and
I burn inside so naturally I
smoke, legs crossed and gripped
like pliers, two puffs and half-gone,

Enduring like a flaming but seemingly
not consumed auto engine, I
mutter, “unconsciousness-difference-
death or sleep, little death or much
sleep”?

Purple alert - on my stomach, in the
bed-trench but fire dying down,
grabbing pillow like drowning
swimmer clutching life-buoy from
sunk battleship.

Smog, no battlesmoke of sleep clouds
my brain with dim relief, like
light from above for trapped
miners underground.

What can you say about a 90-day
agony that died? Thank God but

Desperately struggle to break last
night's, and the night's before, and
the night's before that, etc.

Speed record for bedtime God-
despaired non-religious rituals,

Teeth-gritting, tooth brushing; cold
sweating, undressing, interior-undercoating

burning, wrenching swim-suit on,

I gag on my medication, (shirk I wish
I could these torture pills) so I
will be a relaxed blah, a flesh-and-
entail fog tomorrow morning.

Yellow alert-fists clenched, back
on sheet, sheet over legs in 90-degree
night, land mines exploding over entrails,

Red alert - on right side, facing
doorway and escape, never facing prison
wall, eyes pushed closed,
bitter memories bomb me;
a true hate and fear story.

Nude Beach #3

Tom Racine

We stand naked on the beach
like northern seals.
I watch three young women
try the new experience,
and undress from their swimming suits.
Full cream breasts, firm skin, muscles taunt
and all the stuff that makes them
right. Long blond flowing hair (at least two of them)
and, you know, the things that make men stare
and yearn
and have hard-ons late at night.

The waves rush in and Kathy
frolics in front of me
distracting my view
asking,
“Honey, what do you want for dinner?”

SANIBEL

NOTES (1)

Duane Locke

White dust leaps up
From bleached shell,
White sand road,
Swoops through the air
Like a Snowy Owl,
Perches on edges
Of mangrove leaves,
The mangrove rattles.
Concealed in mangrove leaves,
A kingfisher.
I hold out my hand
To be touched
By the sound
As it walks by me.



artwork by Cheryl Townsend

And so I kissed her
 On the steps of the wooden city
 Before I left port
 The hard ground on which I had left
 Was but a memory of little warmth

In this hellish cold rain
 The bloody waves relentless
 Struck her sides like a hammer
 We were but a paper boat
 In a bathtub of infants
 Yet the grey depths slammed us more
 Other than the memories there was only
 The rationed cups of cocoa
 Did I mention the memories

Shouts call me to the deck once again
 Smoke beckons us in the distance
 A Chinese merchant vessel this time
 Confusion run down their bloodied faces
 As they look to us for saving
 But my kit does not supply
 Me with an interpreter
 I can only try to heal
 And move to the next empty face

But the kiss and the thoughts
 Of pre-war life
 Carries me through the pummeling
 From the unforgiving side of nature
 Forty days to go and countless waves.

Leaving the Port of St. John's

**Darren
 Anderson**

a steady coo
a steady collapse
searching for a steady cable to walk on

taking the mind off monday
throwing glasses
breaking down technical barriers
learning from the ancient text of lepers
remote and dreaming of a hug
dreaming of a haymaker

catching on
the newest fad
a slap bracelet and a pet rock all rolled into an atomic weapon
every kid has one these days

maybe it's all out of the question now
maybe it's the American way to wake up every morning
it's our turn to have a nightmare
the sweetest angel's touch is too simple

i need a bit more by now
i need a therapist
i need whiteout a blackout a water shortage
i need floods and fires and a tidal wave on the New York Shore

robots taking over
covering every variable
a rolodex of death
at the bottom of the Atlantic the nuclear devices are rotting
I'm afraid to drink the water

Slap Bracelets, Pet Rocks and Nuclear Weapons

j. dyson

The Plastic People

Jason L. Sanders

In a warm, softly lit Virginia cabin,
I was surrounded
By glowing amethyst crystals
And flickering candles.
I watched their light
Gently lick the grains
Of the exposed wooden beams.
I swallowed a purple pill.

Several minutes passed and I opened my eye--
Not knowing what I would confront.
Through a dissolving luminous mist
I recognized that I was on a train--
A crowded Tokyo commuter train.
It sliced through the rain and
Weaved through thousands of drab buildings and
Thundered by thousands of grey houses.
(Their awnings and windows rattled.)

An old man,
Wearing black robes and an evil smirk
Appeared by my side.
He whispered:

"Can you see the sagging, unsmiling faces
Etched and burned by unkind places?"

"Can you smell the sweat and quiet despair
As we hurtle through the humid Tokyo air?"

"Can you hear the strained and artificial voices
Of those unhappy with most of their choices?"

I turned away from the old man,
Who was unable to conceal his joy.
He cackled and danced a little jig
And declared with a twisted grin:

"Welcome, my son, my intrepid traveler.
Welcome to the Machine."

THE ENORMOUS FETUS

Thomas Trull

It milked a titan thumb in utero
clear as a Rorschach ink blot
on the closely monitored sonogram
The thousandth trimester passed
with no celebration from the lab coat grad
student assigned to watch the night
it passed

Half a woman lay preserved in sodium smoke
Mother
disintegrated
missed her window
mourned numb and then dead
both her womb and orphan inside a hospital on a bay

Her birth sac bobbed in a soup
thickly glazed with protein
wide and deep enough to comfort a whale
while tiny diving needles
probed and collected and beamed to a motherboard

Great lamps wheeled around a motorized track
Brilliant white penetrated the karo glistening ghoul
banked bent beams against the sac's outer wall
grown black as a medicine ball

Some midnight behind the block white building
a barge sauntered alone across the bay
answered the greeting waves with the creak
of rusty iron
The barge moved
the cargo to a misty landfill across the bay
bins with garbage in cornrows stretching
from one side to another
under no moon the men heaving
a bubble of skin into the dark lick of saltwater
worked unmonitored by feminine eyes

America in extremis

Joe Hart

And I am as sick
Of heterosexual love songs
As blacks must have been
Of seeing whites on television
And nothing else
And nothing else.
And now in crisis
They fly their flags
And have prayer meetings,
These homophobes
 and racists and prigs.
And I want to scream.
But I say nothing.
And I wait
And I watch
For the one bomb to drop
That will silence their prayers
And extinguish their patriotism
And kill their gods
And end my hatred
Forever.

An image

Joe Hart

The subtle consternation of the sea,
The constant sea that sleepily engulfs
The sodden, deep-sunk posts of wooden piers
Is heaving its involvements to the sand.
The sky is low. Already I can feel
The nearness in an image
Of the deepness of the sea.
I see the sea in human conjuration.
Up from my depth I think the depth
Of oceans.
About the sea - I wonder what there is
About the sea; a magic I can touch
About the sea.

A picture

Joe Hart

The gnarled wind-wetted wooden posts
Point blindly to the sea,
Stuck in sand around the rocks
In rugged, old complaisance.
The sea-gulls crown the inner air
With swoops of flight and noises.
Their double-crescents, grey and white
Swim just above the swells.
The reef of rocks in silhouette
Rears ragged from the sea.
The taste of salt is in the sand,
The old posts slant and lean.
And all is blue and all is grey.
The ocean's deadly rustle
Washes up against the rocks
And then goes back to sea.
In the sky the subtle clouds
Are like the puffs of breath
Against a hand when someone speaks.
The air is cool and warm.

Orange Soda

Mary B. Chow

Always thought of Terror
 Having to go with my dad
 Silent screams of “NO!”
 A deep stomach-pit dread
 Aching to drag my feet,
 Dig in my heels
 Postpone the seemingly inevitable

Always different place
 In the woods, at the lake
 Along a lonely road, in the attic
 Mid afternoon, late evening
 Always the smells
 Body odor, rancid alcohol

Always the unbreable piercing
 Twiga scraping my skin
 Insects biting tender flesh
 Rocks beneath me
 Grinding into me above
 The burning afterward as I peed

Always afterward
 At some bar
 Sitting alone
 Invisible in a booth with
 Orange soda:
 As if it could repair the damage

Don't all the crazy girls

Tara Marie Gilbert-Brever

have black eyes,
 big feet,
 braided pigtails,
 Bibles with ripped pages,
 bogeymen with real bodies;

have thin fingers,
 terrible spelling,
 torn hems,
 trees named after them,
 trouble sleeping in quiet houses;

have muddy knees,
 milk breath,
 mercury rising,
 mothers who pretend not to see,
 my face in their mirror?

Passover

Tara Marie Gilbert-Breuer

*Why don't you have one?
She'd have your almond
eyes...*

This spring my friends grew
batches of babies
in time for the tulips.
The atmosphere
is heated by the hatched
spirits; the summer
is hurried
by the sum
of new fingers.

What was so certain
about months ago,
why did touch fall heavier
and last all the way
into fresh lives?
How was so much lady-
skin bitten quick, hitting
it close to bone, hiding
the scab out of reach?

Last summer I was passed
over-no souls in wait
to chew through to me.
My friends pass their children
into my lap;
my body fists around such small
flesh, but monthly pushes
out the juices
that would harden to this.

Why don't you have one?
she'd have your almond
eyes...
but I will not follow
my friends, loose the strings
around my instinct,
cup the kisses, pool
them in the home
between my legs.

Why does air have its way
with blood, scaring
it red? What is it about blue,
that it wastes so fast,
why can't it take root;
why does sky
steal the eyes
out of babies?

This morning, like every
other 28, I held the pill
on my tongue for a second,
tasting the "selfish"
sweet shield. I bow
out of the power to create,
to pour my tangled
contents into clean
bodies, vessels that might founder.

The Concrete City

Kevin Calaguero

Coffee
Cigarette
Breakfast of champions

I wish the sun would warm
This desolate concrete city
Where trees are a luxury
And taxicabs flourish
With the wind on my neck

We play our roles in the city
The student
The doctor
The homeless man
The mother
The whore
No room

I am sitting in a pool of academics
Waiting to let it out
Holding it in
Like a child who has to pee

Foolish Quaalude
Swimming in this sea
The concrete city

Feel the fingertips that mollify
Adagio music over skin
Falling soft the to taste

Releasing the dead fish
And watching them flop on the streetscape
In the concrete city

Fingers
Hands
Holding it out
Hoping

I can hear the voices again
I can see the signs again
Please sir
Won't you see me
Play our song to the city
Two acoustic guitars
Like harmony to a voice

Play it out
In the concrete city
While taxicabs bring home
The doctors
The lawyers
The whores to hotels

And watch it turn my blue to black

By Way of the Drug

Kevin Calaguero

Acoustic rock to my ear
Binding me to the moment
Feeding me

Magnificent lifeless roses
Looming over a makeshift vase
Honey dew and sickle cell
Watching the day haze away

Between cigarettes
And nights passing
Living life by way of the drug

Piloting this plane
Drawing death in
And waiting for the wake

In the mass of culture
Of struggle
Masked by lust
Holding it to me

Watching the ash of night
Mix with the breath
Rolling with life

But Most of All

Padma Jared Thornlyre

My daughter's transition between
Her Madeline puzzle and zonked
Unusually swift. Her mama's right
About warmed milk with honey.

Alone with the war, now, I read
Erotica, sniff cardamom, drink
Scotch, and sink my fingernails
Into my scalp, but not quite deeply

Enough to draw blood. Just close.
These sensations the sticky stuff
Of living. Driving home on 40
Up Genesee Mountain after work

Today, the road gave way to the beast
Of Bethlehem, a suicide bomber,
An American soldier scraping a talib
Off his boots, the tanks of Israel rolling

Into Ramallah. The road gives way
To rubble, to a dancer who lost his
Teeth, fleeing Manhattan's wall of ash.
Bodies thunk into the bed of my pickup.

How distinguish the faces of hate,
Whose single difference is their name
For God? Arafat becomes Sharon
Becomes Bush becomes bin Laden.

I search for Gandhi among the gullies
Of Lookout Mountain and in the trees
Of Paradise Hills and—yon—Buddha
In the eyes of Genesee's bison. I recite,

Without the usual comfort, the First
Amendment, to hedge against the burning
Crosses and lynchings that rise from the road
In front of me with the guns of Chivington

And Black Kettle's blood that just won't stop
Spilling. I wipe my mother's spit from my
Eyes. And the spit of her bronze star husband.
American sons died soldiers in his arms,

But I cannot help myself, I can't help but see
The undecorated baby boy, the little girl,
Torched for the original sin of being born
Vietnamese, can't help my doubting

That their mothers' grief was somehow
Less human than his. Americans died,
And die, in the art of killing. I pass the flag
On Genesee bridge, where it's whipped

Since last September, but I blow my daily
Kiss to the Continental Divide, my elder-
Earthen lodge of the Great Spirit (the father
I wish I knew) and White Buffalo Woman.

I wipe the spit from my eyes.
It keeps on comin' but all I want to do
Is shield my girl from those who hate,
Stem the rise of gore that bars her peace.

Padma Jared Thornlyre was born in 1959 in Fort Collins, Colorado. Graduating from Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa in 1981, Thornlyre returned to Colorado, and now lives in Evergreen with his wife, Julie, and daughter, Circe. A student of Tibetan Nyingma Buddhism, Jared received the name "Padma Gyalpo" from his lama, Chagdud Tulku, Rinpoche, upon taking his bodhisattva vow, after which he legally changed his name from Jared Dean Farnsworth. "Thornlyre" is Padma's own invention, the flowering of several years' contemplation. Padma is a member of The Ancient Order of the Fire Giggers-poets and musicians who honor the Earth by cleaning a remote but beautiful stretch of Colorado highway and gathering yearly in the Rocky Mountains to reaffirm their dedication to community and shared values, most especially art and environment. Most Giggers bear a Gigger-specific nickname: Padma's is "Mossbeard."

Quick Notes on the Writing Versus the Performance of Poetry

Padma Jared Thornlyre

It's the voice in my head, not
the voice on my tongue (a mere
approximation, that) I care for
most. Performing means asking

How do I look? Am I too cavalier
in denims, too elitist in this hat,
or that, too nonchalant, too
stiff? And How do I sound?
And Can I hold it in, this gas
percolating in the cauldron of my
bowels, lentil-fed and nervous?

On the page, I have no importance,
and that is most comfortable; let
thesis candidates debate Homer,
I'll read the Odyssey; give me
The Tempest, Shakespeare's bio
means nothing. I am not
them, of course. On stage, I'd
rather not matter, but I must.

On stage, it's a matter of volume,
apparently, the number of obscenities
well-shouted in the shortest timespan;
on stage, there's no time for the subtle
witcheries of cadence, those reverberations,
to sink in, for double-or-more-entendres,
for mulling or chewing or the slow
sucking of marrow for all it's worth.

from Impressions on His First Father's Day

Padma Jared Thornlyre

1.

Half-dead coyote
reduced to mangle and the will to live
finds his legs, some meat
to hide his bones—a stag
bleeding into the creek—
road-kill to stave off starvation
for another day, perhaps
a week. Deer-blood

and mining produce

Floods

Matt Turner

a flood of people, uniform and diverse,
in their lives, their aims and now,
aimlessly succumbing to a lake of agnosticism,
for they fear what they do not understand.

They journey, pretending that they've moved on,
that he isn't there, dismissively fooling themselves:
"He doesn't exist"
before truculently declaring
"he is no longer necessary",
ask them what happens now?

no-one knew, except one, the prophet who
lived in a box in winchester street.
they ignored him, fearing him, spitting on him,
How they would regret it later, when there lives were enveloped.

He had a name.

He had arrived out of the blue, from no where,
society didn't believe him, they couldn't,
for it hurts to examine yourself.
He was an intruder into their consciousness,
and above all a stranger.

Eternity, it was argued, could not exist.
Nor could freedom, but they believe what they want.
Now they know,
how it tortured them,
asked them their questions.
Now it sits watching,
content and detached,
as if he weren't inseperable.

he had told them what they feared,
and rather than embrace, they reject, and suffer.
Machiavelli re-born, he began his circadion castigation,
for forty full revolutions of the sun.
Eternity grew solicitous .

the world was washed away.
where was you sacred science now?
in his pocket.

So here is whats left, a place full
of nothing, a utopia of silence,
and a godless world, just as before.

the silly little games we play,
we annoy each other, and yet
kill each other with our love.

you shout and scream and I stare
at you, as though you were a ghost,
looking through you to your proud centre.

I do not reply, nor do you give me reason to,
everything is black and white,
with frilly lace around the sides.

I wonder, as I analyse other people,
as to what they think of us, whether
they understand us, or perhaps if they hate us.

i suppose we can be a deadly duo,
when you take into account,
the manipulative intelligence of us on our own

but then together, we do not seek to annoy,
but we let others grow green,
that is annoyance enough to most.

one day, one of us will die,
and they will signal the end for both,
because despite all the tears and decibels

the games we play

Matt Turner

A Toll Tale

Bridget Cowles

I guess I'm just basically pissed off. All around me I see pretty people with electronic devices in their laps, on their belts, attached to their wrists, stuck in their ears. They're so focused on the things going on inside those high tech gadgets that they fail to see the pain of the person sitting squeezed in next to them on the bus. Sometimes that person is me, tired after a long day in a toll booth, taking money from assholes driving overpriced toys that take enough gasoline to support an entire OPEC nation. The little prematurely balding guy in the huge SUV with the custom extra-huge, extra-knobby tires doesn't even deign to give me a nod. Just shoves money in my hand and roars off, leaving a choking trail of burned diesel fuel to mark his presence. Barbaric ass that he is, it's like he thinks he's somehow more advanced on the evolutionary scale because a family of five could live comfortably in the shadow of his off-road vehicle that's never left the pavement.

Then there are the little bimbettes that travel in packs and think that I'll let them through the toll gate for free if they flash me some perky flesh. Hell, I've seen enough pink-skinned college girls' breasts to publish my own soft porn magazine if I could figure out a way to download the images from my memory to glossy photo paper. I've never let one of them through for free, though. I pride myself on acting like I don't see a thing. One time about twenty-five, thirty years ago when me and my wife first moved to the Bay area so I could go to UCSF, but instead started this "career" of mine—early seventies I'd guess—this VW van full of little hippie chicks drives up. They were smokin' a doob and carrying on like they'd never been outta Kansas. "Hey, mister," they said. "We're kinda short on cash. Any way you could let us through for free?" Well, I told 'em they'd need to pay like everyone else, but they kept arguing and offered me a hit off their soggy roach. The little skinny blonde that was driving the van turned and said something to her lovebead-draped sisters that made them giggle like mad. Next thing I knew, there were six pair of sun kissed nipples up against the van's windows. The boys in the Mustang behind them went nuts, but I just held out my hand and asked them one more time for the toll as if this happened every day. Tell the truth, I'd already been married four or five years and those were the first breasts I'd seen in that whole time. But that's another story.

Worse than anything that's ever happened to me in the booth, though, is the way people pretend

you don't even exist when you're on the bus with them. After a long day of breathing everyone else's tail pipe smoke, listening to the complaints about the toll being raised, having my heartbeat changed by the pounding bass of these punk-ass kids' stereos, and getting my butt chewed by my boss for taking two minutes too long in the bathroom, the last thing I need is to be reminded that if I wasn't alive, no one but my wife and her ugly freakin' crazy mother who practically lives on our living room couch would even know I was missing. My boss would replace me in twenty minutes with someone younger, faster, cheaper, less experienced, of course, with a "more team oriented attitude," who'd be happy to suck up to him and listen to his stupid ass stories about hiking in Yosemite. When some lady slides in next to me, smelling of cheap perfume and vodka, pushing her cushiony ass up against me so she can get her string shopping bag on the seat next to her a carton of cigarettes, a box of Fruit Loops, and some cans of tuna falling out and rolling down the aisle who's she to pretend she doesn't know I'm there? She's practically crawled up on my lap. The least she could do is give me a smile. Not like I'm going to molest her because she's treating me like a human being instead of like I'm a freakin' street sign put there just to lean her ass up against.

But let me tell you, it burns me up even more when I see it happening to someone else. Other day, I'm half asleep on the bus three or four stops from home and this young man's struggling to get up the stairs. He's using one of those metal crutches and carrying a backpack and some books and foreign newspapers in a plastic bag from that news stand right over there. I see about seventeen pairs of eyes look away while he bangs his shin on the bottom stair, drops the bag in the street, and bends to pick it up. I go out to help him pick up his books and try to fish a paper out from under the bus. "Thanks," he says to me in a guttural, kinda slurry voice, like maybe he's had a head injury or something. I just tell him no sweat and wait for him to climb up in front of me. Something about him seems to embarrass everyone else on the bus. They're all looking in every direction except at him. Well, except for the driver who's sighing impatiently while he digs the money for his fare out of his pocket. When he sits down, I see that the hand that holds the crutch has a slight tremor and one foot turns in limply. I hand him his bag and he smiles gratefully. I wonder about how hard it must be to do this bus gig every day when you move slower than most people under the age of ninety and no one wants to admit you're different or even alive. Then I realize, he's the only one who seems to know I'm alive, too, and I think maybe he's luckier in some ways than all the others.

Grit In My Teeth

Bridget Cowles

After living in Tahiti, I developed a taste for sand.

I was awarded a two year grant--almost unheard of--to live and write in paradise, then moved back to New York a year earlier than I intended. Unfortunately, I'd been so happy in Tahiti that I was forced to give back some of the money and come home where I continue to feel dismal enough to be productive.

How does a woman like me "develop a taste for sand?" Let me tell you.

I'd been on the island for six months, lounging around in a hammock, staring at the fish through the glass floor of my hut, actually taking long walks on the beach just for the hell of it. In New York, whenever possible, I don't walk much farther than to a waiting taxi.

I hadn't spoken to anyone except for the elderly Tahitian woman who brought me fresh food each day and swept out my hut. Couldn't actually be called conversations, but she was pleasant. It freed me up from having to take on the mundane chores of caring for myself. Every single item that woman brought into my house had a few grains of stark white sand clinging to it. Even though she washed everything she put in the kitchen, there was always a light dust at the bottom of my refrigerator. I never saw it going in. Perhaps it was just so much a part of the place that it floated in the air, like the dust motes and soot back in the city.

My normal depressive nature was slowly giving way to a sense of peace and contentment the likes of which I'd never known. It was such a foreign feeling--I hadn't yet determined whether I liked it or not. I'm not sure I was even aware of what I was feeling.

Even the solitude was new for me. A New Yorker is never really alone. For me, whether on the subway or in the midst of a conversation with my closest and not-very-dearest friend, Silvana, I feel as if I'm the only one who's truly aware, truly in touch with the depth of the tragedy in which we live--but I never feel alone. Wish I did. It would be less painful than feeling crammed in with half the population of the world, but still being apart. It's the isolated crowding that feeds my depression; it's my depression that makes me write.

No one can really understand how intensely I feel things. Now, I'm sure some of you are saying, "Oh, no, you underestimate me. I feel things." Go ahead and tell yourselves that, but I know differently. I'm a woman constantly in a state of despair, angst, worry, anxiety. It's just that way for me. If I'm going to keep making a living song writing, that's the way it better stay.

Sorry. I'm digressing again in that self-indulgent way which has chased away all my former lovers. To hell with them, anyway. And to hell with you if you're in a rush for me sort this out.

Where was I? Yeah, solitude. Well, the most amazing thing happened to me in Tahiti. As I spent more and more time alone on the beach, I felt more and more connected to the rest of the world. It was a wonderfully pleasant feeling. I finally understood those annoyingly cheerful store clerks who chase you out of their store with a lilting curse of "Have A Nice Day!" Okay, there aren't really many of them in New York, but I've been other places, too. And, yes, they do capitalize every word when they talk. Damned if I know why.

Happy and content, I decided to accept one of the innumerable social invitations that were always being delivered by the housekeeper: a dinner party at the vacation home of a well-known American actress and her much younger lover.

No, won't tell you who she is or who else attended. This is my story.

The day of the party arrived, and I was oddly excited. In fact, I couldn't ever remember being excited about any social event before. The closest I'd felt in the past was a sinking dread. Almost the same physical reaction: queasy stomach, light sweat, shortness of breath. Excitement, however, is much more energizing. Not wanting to over- or under-dress, I wore all black--you can never go wrong with black. Yeah, Tahiti is warm for all black, but I have an image to uphold. Remember, I was invited for my depressive New York demeanor and poet/songwriter status.

The party wasn't until 9:00. Parties don't start until after dark, even in Tahiti. I was feeling so damn perky I decided to walk the three miles. Almost dark when I started out, yet there was the most incomparable sunset spreading behind me. Along the way, I saw those exotic night-blooming flowers. What are they called? I don't remember either. Anyway, I saw those beautiful flowers, I heard the calls of tropical birds, I smelled now-familiar, but unidentified sweet scents.

By the time I got to the party, I was singing aloud. I don't do that. Ever.

Inside, the usual wild array of the famous and infamous. There were several people I didn't know or recognize. Almost everyone seemed to know me. My hostess was surprised when I wrapped my arms around her, swinging her up off her feet as I planted a kiss on her perfectly rouged cheek. When I put her back down, she swayed for a moment before regaining the composure for which she's so well known. Suspicious, she said, "Marina, you quit drinking?"

A hearty laugh escaped me. "Well, I hadn't thought about it. But you know, I've hardly had any coffee, cigarettes, or alcohol since I came to the island."

"Writing much?" her ever-present, swarthy Latin lover asked.

"Some. As a matter of fact, my writing's found a new direction," I replied. "I brought along a new poem, if you'd like me to read it."

Those guests not already out on the deck crowded around. I read an enthusiastic two page ode to the salty scent of the sea shells decorating the small table next to my bed. The man who'd been standing attentively at my elbow since my arrival backed away and sat on a stool at the rattan bar. No appreciation for the beauty of simple things.

I followed the ode with a sonnet about the pleasure of lounging in a hammock for days at a time. More people drifted away, some muttering, looking over their shoulders at me as they retreated in search of booze.

As I started in on my third poem, which starts, My true love's eyes are as green as the fronds of the palm tree which rustles in the balmy breeze, my hostess quickly took my hand and said, "Marina, honey, read that one later. We don't want you to spoil my guests, now do we? Let's make them wait." She practically pushed me onto the tropical print couch next to a bottle blond who appeared to be passed out. A fine stream of saliva oozed out of the corner of the woman's mouth, and her skirt was caught on the back of the couch cushion, exposing most of one hip.

The rest of the party was spent in brief conversations with a very skittish crowd of people. As soon as I began to talk about the wonders of the island and how I'd finally found true happiness, my partner in conversation found an excuse and dashed off. Finally, a gallery owner from New York, whom

I'd known for a decade, left the group he'd been talking to. They watched him as he walked toward me. I felt like I was back at my first junior high school party, hoping one of the cool guys would ask me to dance, conscious that the other kids were watching and waiting to see who'd be picked last, praying it wouldn't be me.

When he got to where I stood, the man--yes, he must remain nameless--bent toward me and said in a confidential tone, "Your cheerfulness is really putting a damper on this party. You know, Marina, you're downright upbeat." He lowered his voice further. "Stop it--it's going to ruin your career."

Well, that's it about the party, but I must say the man was right. I stayed on the island for another six months. My social invitations all but dried up. Instead of hearing from my girls Alanis and Fiona, the only mail forwarded from New York was an offer from Pat Boone to collaborate on a children's album. I actually considered it. The work I sent home to my agent was returned with a letter expressing great concern about my mental state. I laughed it off. I was so ecstatic with my new life, I kept writing my pleasant little songs.

Finally, one day my agent arrived on the island. He found me lying in my hammock, a joyous song on my lips. He walked up to me and pulled me to my feet. Holding me by the shoulders, he shouted, "Snap out of it, Marina!" At my startled look he let go of me and lowered his voice. "I'm worried about you. Your career is drying up as we speak, and the word in New York's you're writing verse for Hallmark." He took my hand in his. "Come home now."

Against my will, I packed my few belongings. I brought a coffee can full of the sand from the beach.

So, that's how I came to be living back in the Village, alternating cups of espresso with whiskey. With my first experience of happiness, the only thing that keeps me depressed, besides the comforting dirt and crime and overcrowding of the city, of course, is a steady diet of caffeine, cigarettes, and booze. Every now and then, I'll take a small fistful of the fine white sand and sprinkle it around my flat. I put some in my bathtub, a dusting in my bedsheets, and always leave some in the bottom of my refrigerator. Having the sand here helps me not to feel so deprived, but I have to be careful not to lose touch with all of that angst and rage which keeps my poetry and song lyrics sharp.

So, can I bum a cigarette? I just finished my last pack.

Who Will Save Your Soul?

Bridget Cowles

“Please help me,” Alma pleads to a peaceful plastic dash-board Mary praying on a shelf above the table where she’s sitting. Images of the Virgin litter her table, her walls, even her bathroom. She runs her hands through her hair, pushing her bangs off her forehead. “Why can’t I just do this?”

Again she puts the unlit cigarette between her lips, sighs. She hopes she won’t light it.

Looking up at the calendar, she stares at the date with the thick black square around it. Three more days. Yet not one thing worth submitting to her current boss, Beverly Taylor, “acclaimed children’s author.” Beverly writes much too cute for any real child.

Alma yawns, long and loud. “Staying up all night is definitely not as easy as it used to be,” she mumbles, dangling the cigarette. Instead of working on the contracted illustrations, she finds herself scribbling an image of Virgin Mary. Mary is at the seashore holding a colorfully striped beach ball, a 1940’s-style swimsuit covering her modestly, still unmistakably the woman who bore Jesus. At Mary’s feet sits a long haired baby boy, lovingly stroking the red shell of a crab, tears on his cheeks.

Alma shakes off the urge to indulge her artistic whims, admonishing herself. Got to draw these stupid bears.

She looks at the clock. “Thirty minutes since the last one,” she announces to the room, empty except for her oldest friend, Buddy, sleeping on the tattered corduroy couch. The aging retriever raises his head at the sound. He thumps his golden tail once and lies back down. Instantly, the dog is snoring softly. She puts down her pencil and slowly unwraps a Hershey’s Kiss. The silver square of foil joins numerous others in the ashtray which also holds the unlit cigarette, the filter wet from hours in and out of her mouth. The chocolate rests comfortably on her tongue, slowly turning liquid. Her eyes close and a small moan is swallowed with the first drops of melted chocolate.

Looking up, her eyes rest on a primitive Virgin of Guadalupe made of Mexican clay, painted with Liza Minelli eyes and rosebud lips. She hangs on the wall next to a mermaid who could have been crafted by the same villager. One hand is on her green scaled hip, the other behind her head in a movie-star pose. The two clay women look like sisters. That would make an interesting story, she thinks, smiling. Maybe she should write the story of the Immaculate Virgin and the siren of the sea, sisters taking vastly different paths. She could do some great illustrations for a book like that, and maybe get out from under Beverly’s thumb.

Alma releases a long sigh and places the cigarette back between her lips. Break’s over. Get serious. She talks

to herself sternly now.

For the twentieth time she pulls out her draft of the story. It's about a family of amazingly cute bears. The tale centers around the mischief which Brother Bobby gets into by ignoring the advice of his wise parents. Sister Sally shines in her perfection. The more trouble Brother Bobby gets into, the more Sister Sally minces around being helpful. Alma hates that bear.

Her own sister, Gloria, gorgeous and thin just like their mother, always got the good grades, always dated the handsome rich sons of their parents' friends: she is her mother's dream. Now married to a successful cardiologist, she still has the perfect life. Nothing like me; I'm Brother Bobby, the family embarrassment. Unlike Sister Sally the bear, her sister Gloria doesn't try to be perfect. She just seems to have been born that way.

No point in dwelling on her mother's disappointment at having a daughter so different from her ideal. She will never really please her mother; the illustrations are their only link. Pulling out clean paper, she pastes a cheerful smile on her face. Done it before. I can do it again. Last time it was that adorable family of kittens. The smile quickly stiffens. How many times can this same insipid story be told? Who cares, anyway, about this perfect little family? Does Beverly really think anyone will buy this piece of fluff? Alma gets paid whether it sells or not. "God knows, I need the money," she reminds herself.

Grimacing at her reflection in the hammered tin mirror hanging on the wall, she says sickly, "It'll probably sell a million copies."

The longer she lives alone, the more she talks to herself. Lack of sleep seems to be increasing the tendency three-fold. She shrugs. Who'd care anyway?

Alma walks across the room barefoot to the dishwasher-sized refrigerator and pulls out another diet Dr. Pepper. Maybe caffeine'll help, she thinks as she opens the fourth soda of the morning. Ten years ago they would've been beers.

"And ten years ago I wouldn't have thought twice about prostituting my talent," she says to her retriever. He wags his tail, eyes still closed.

She opens the French doors, letting the breeze draw in the heavy scent of honeysuckle backed by the occasional whisper of wisteria. The season's almost over for the sweet flowers; better appreciate these last few. Looking up at the clock, she sees it's time for more chocolate. She's made it another half hour. She pulls the paper tab on the tip and the foil peels down. "Thank you for giving me something to live for," she says aloud to the chocolate gods and

reaches for two more.

The damp cigarette drops from her fingers to the floor, unnoticed by Alma. The soft thump is heard by the old dog, however. His eyes open and his ears point forward. He hops off the couch and stiffly walks across the studio to investigate, his nails clicking on the wooden floor. Gently, he picks up the bent cigarette in his mouth and carries it to the side of the couch. He drops the prize and pushes it with his nose where it joins the other twisted, broken, or soggy unlit cigarettes that have been dropped in the last two weeks and now lie half-hidden beneath the couch. Alma watches him clean up after her and laughs softly, stifling another yawn.

“Okay, gonna do it now,” she assures herself and her beloved companion, now back on his couch, circling to get comfortable.

She knows what Beverly wants. She was very explicit about what she loosely referred to as the “characterization” of her bears. They should be done in a variety of pastel colors: “Pink for Mother Bear, blue for Father Bear, green for Brother Bobby, and lavender for Sister Sally,” Beverly instructed, sitting in her ever-present steel blue cloud of cigarette smoke. “You know, like the Care Bears, but not too much like the Care Bears,” the older woman had warned. “And I want Mother Bear wearing an apron.”

Beverly Taylor, the author of Bobby Bear’s Lesson, has written sixteen other successful, animal-populated, moral little children’s books promoting the ideal of so-called “family values.” She’s an even bigger hypocrite than I am, Alma thinks. Right now she’s probably getting it on with her pool-boy while her most recent husband’s upstairs drinking himself to death. She and her mother have always struggled with each other, but ever since Daddy died it’s been even harder.

Sighing again, she walks back to her drawing table, formerly the front door of an up-valley mansion. On the far side, the hole left by the removal of the old brass knob is the perfect size for the cobalt blue Bromo Seltzer jar which holds her pencils. She selects an easily erasable soft Koh-i-noor and sharpens it. The yellow lacquered wood is smooth between her fingers. Enough stalling--here goes.

“What I’d really like to do is draw them like a family of hard-core bikers,” Alma says now to her studio walls. She smiles as she envisions them all encased in black leather and denim, Mama Bear leaning back against the sissy bar of Daddy-o Bear’s Harley, the kids in the side car. That’d knock old Beverly on her ass. She gives herself a minute to enjoy the image of the author’s horror at the desecration of her perfect family.

The few moments of pleasure at her mother's expense fade away. Back to the reality of her job, her life. Why does she work so hard to get her mother's approval, even though she tells herself she doesn't care what Beverly thinks? No matter what she does it will never be enough. Gloria and Beverly have lunch at the country club every week. They shop together and go to the same parties. Alma knows she has always been her mother's great disappointment; she even heard her say so on the phone once. "Well, yes, I'd love to have both girls attend the dance at the club, but you know Alma just never fits there." Her voice dropped to a whisper. "She really is her father's daughter. Gloria, on the other hand, is my girl and I just know she'll make a perfect match." Alma was sixteen.


Even when she does exactly what Beverly asks, she gets nothing in return but more criticism. "The drawings are nice enough, Alma dear, but don't you think they'd be better if you'd just--" She shakes off the image: counterproductive.

On the radio, a song catches her attention. Jewel's singing, "And who will save your soul if you won't save your own?" Good question. She thinks about how when she's tired she seems to find more significance in familiar things. Like songs. Sometimes even TV commercials. God, Jewel's got a beautiful voice. She'd give anything to be able to sing like her.

One more thing, she thinks as she rummages around for her small box of matches. Then she'll really get to work. She lines up the tall glass cylinders containing her Virgin candles. The Lady of Fatima, the Virgin of Guadalupe, La Milagrosa, the Sacred Heart of Mary, the Lady of Lourdes, hopefully they will give inspiration and guidance. Her Holy Lady of Latte candle--a birthday gift--stands at the end of the line. The candles now lit, the smell of sulfur and hot wax mixes with the sweet scents from the flowers outside.

When she places the pencil against the expanse of white paper, she has every intention of drawing Mother Bear cheerfully cooking breakfast while Father Bear sits in his recliner, a newspaper clutched in his furry blue paws, a cup of coffee steaming on the TV tray next to the chair.

Once again, however, instead of drawing the overly familiar images of the frolicking family of pastel bears, she finds herself branching off in a more creative direction, her fatigue pushing her forward. As she starts to draw, her fingers seem to have their own plans. Working faster and faster, she draws Mother Bear in a long black nun's habit, a large crucifix at her waist, a ruler and a huge ring of keys clutched in her paw. Father Bear wears



a priest's cassock, a pious expression on his face, a Bible held before him in both paws. Brother Bobby wears the coarse robe and open sandals of a monk who has taken the vow of poverty and hard work. He carries a basket of grapes, the vineyard visible through the open door of what appears to be a chapel where they are all gathered in their religious pursuits. Little Sister Sally is clothed in the simple dress of a novice and kneels in prayer before a life-sized statue of the Virgin, a bear.

Alma is exhausted from the spent rush of energy. She drops her pencil and looks down at the paper, simultaneously bursting into laughter and tears. "What's this supposed to mean?" she asks the flickering candles lined up in front of her. No answer comes. She has been sitting here for thirty-two hours not drawing. What is the message I'm supposed to be getting?

She stomps to her closet, stands on the rickety wooden stool and retrieves the slightly mashed cellophane-encased pack from behind an old box of love letters. Angrily, she clamps a stale cigarette between her teeth. Back at the table, she opens the small box of wooden matches. She lights one, stares at it until it burns her fingers and drops it in her jar of watercolor water.

If she doesn't get the drawings done by Friday, she stands to lose everything, little as that is. Beverly will never hire her again to illustrate another of her horrid little stories. She also knows she'll lose this picturesque studio where she and her dog have lived since she moved back to town. Bitch. She'll kick my ass right off her estate, even though I am her daughter.

Picking up her warm diet Dr. Pepper, she walks to the couch where her dog is sleeping and sits next to him, pulling her knees to her chin. She scratches her friend between the ears. He nuzzles his face into her leg and gives his tail a weak wag. "You know, Buddy, getting fired and evicted might be the best thing for us both." She fondles the cigarette, stroking her fingers down the length of its whiteness. She runs it beneath her nose, smells it, and slowly places it between her lips.

She walks back to her drawing table, sits down, pulls out fresh paper, and picks up her pencil. "On the other hand, maybe I'll do this one last book for her. Just one more." She raises her soda can in a salute to the row of Virgin candles, takes a long drink and starts.

Agenda

Dan Provost

Frustrated with self-analysis #999, which forced me to accept life's lack of compassion-Today I will be incensed with the slow traffic on Route 1 to fulfill my quota of anger.

Failing to conquer the world of dreams; Yesterday, I became upset when I rolled around in my bed. Losing the battle of sleep with tears from lack of love.

Sitting alone with the euphoric bottle, destroying my substance as well as my equilibrium; Tomorrow, I will find no comfort in the sanctity of drunkenness.

Yes, it is too simple to say yesterday was just a dream while today is a war that must be fought.

But tomorrow will come-Bringing symbols of everyday journeys.

The stoplight that fails to click from red to green.

I Used To Be

Gerald Zipper

Back in those days
I would strut
proud as a bantam
fierce as a tiger
stared down the gimlet eye of death
grappled the burning day
assailed the rounding wind
ran the murderous mile in a joyful sprint
I was a lucky lover
passionate as a forest fire
gentle as the preening dove
soft as the down
romantic as a Russian symphony
melodious as a Puccini opera
back in those days
remember?

Rotting Offerings

Alysson B. Parker

1.
well, it never seemed to me that it was worth much

these efforts like women's work
cooking cleaning children or not

but I look with my developed eye, jealous

of the bare bones of life

the I can't afford milk for my baby
but the gods can have a feast.

you take the essence and leave me the substance
that is enough for a fish to eat and not get caught
and wrapped in banana leaves to roast
and melt and expire

in someone's evolved mouth.

2.
swim first, run fast

climb cliffs, but come and show me

your beautiful one

then I would dance like driftwood
limbs locked in hatred
wanting to drown with the seaweed faces of all my memories

I will mislay you under the sea

and you will move back to the old neighbourhood
a place I never go
don't dare me
although I did find your address and was tempted to post a letter

where I'd tell you what a bastard the religious bloke is
him with his rosary and his priest brother
him: he screwed a tree once,
its branches possessing a crevice he found delicious

stick it right in

he told me all about it
relished in the telling

but the pictures of the others (trees, girls, alive for awhile)

were cut out with a razor

so neatly precisely
like a plan to seduce

and it'd be just my luck to fall for it.

3.
there's a certain fish that swims into shore with the tide
but it's so vertically built that when the tide leaves, it's stranded

washes up on the beach

waits until dawn

when the motivated insomniacs come and retrieve their winnings

fillet me
flay me
leave my essence like an odour

because no ants will crawl on my substance and devour me

like I've got some fancy flowers

or I'm coloured like fruit

or I never had a temple or a celebration

to die for
and I have enough money to feed my own baby if I had one (which I don't)

Mind: An Analogy

Patrick J. Cole

My mind is like the USS Constitution
 isn't it, the Constitution, too
 is about 8% original
 you're always replacing parts
 with wooden ships
 so inside now there's only
 a few frames
 a few futtocks left
 from 1789 –
 it's like the farmer's favorite axe:
 "I only replaced the head twice
 and the handle four times"
 like the Buddhist campfire:
 you call it the same fire
 but after an hour
 what is the same about it?
 And you now, and you as a child:
 – what is the same about you?
 There may be 8%
 of the original tool

8%
 of the original ember
 8%
 of the original little boy
 8%
 of the original idea
 there's only 8% of the original
 Constitution
 but they still take her out
 that great white tall ship
 and when they do
 the people gather on the shore
 and cheer the shape of the hull
 the pure yards of canvas sail
 and most of all they cheer
 the unconsciously brave boys
 who scramble up the trees
 and work
 aloft

this gated mind
 no tongue can match/
 reveal.

this rising blood
 no heart can feign/
 control.

these sullen stairs,
 this endless night;
 a chained dog
 cries heroic memories
 into a nameless age.

this damaged light
 no eye can slip/
 repair.

this fetid wind
 no soul can halt/
 escape.

this scripted fate,
 these identical days;
 a bird
 plucks a gnat
 from the air.

This damaged light

Jamie Cavanagh



