

blister and burn



A Collection of Poetry, Short Stories, Essays and Art Work
SCARS PUBLICATIONS AND DESIGN

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...ON OTHER WORK FROM SCARS PUBLICATIONS



Jane B. Roth, writer (on the collection book "Slate and Marrow"): ...Absolutely beautiful. Very impressive. Congratulations. I loved the poem "Clipping Koltin." The photography looks great.

Ryan Malone, writer (on the collection book "Sulphur and Sawdust"): I'm enjoying "Sulphur and Sawdust." The design is phenomenal. Stark, sleek, brilliant, impressive. Very refreshing. The small lines of text running sideways down the pages? Very cool. This is a really, well-done, classy looking anthology. Congratulations.

BAST Media (on the book "Hope Chest in the Attic"): Cool look... in an alternative style and voice. Reads like a labor of love, most meaningful to those close to the author yet reaches any reader with observations and comments on various situations. Definitely worth reading.

Fred Whitehead, editor, Freethought History (on the book "The Window"): There's powerful writing about insane prisoners, really tough and difficult to read, but at the same time, it is real. There is a substantial amount of prose, but also poetry and striking original art work based on computer images.

Ben Ohmart, writer (on the book "Close Cover Before Striking"): I'm currently reading the great book ("Close Cover Before Striking"). It's fantastic. Best \$10 I've ever spent.

Fred Whitehead, editor, Freethought History (on the book "(woman.)"): Kuypers ... is determined to transmit (sexism's) regions so others can avoid pain and suffering. She insists we resolutely examine the roots of our society's obsession with shaping and dominating, which much of the time is men ruling women. What we have done to women isn't pretty. The paradox is that women are socialized to make themselves "pretty," according to the false standards of male fantasies. I'm especially impressed by designed texts, which demonstrate in graphic form how women are viewed in our culture. Pay attention to the language, to the images.

Ed Hamilton, writer (on the magazine "Children, Churches and Daddies"): I really enjoyed the humor section. I'm not a fan of poetry - since much of it is so hard to decipher - but I was impressed by the work here, which tends toward the straightforward and unpretentious. The piece by Anderson is quite perceptive: I liked the way the self-deluding situation of the character is gradually, subtly revealed.

Paul Weinman, writer (on the magazine "Children, Churches and Daddies"): Wonderful new direction - great articles (especially those on AIDS). Great stories - all sorts of hot info!

Jane Butkin Roth, writer (on 1997 Poetry Wall Calendar): The poetry calendars ... look terrific. I loved Crossing the Street, The Burning, and The Year I Reach My Prime. Interesting photos, too. Congratulations on producing a beautiful calendar.

Dusty Dog Reviews, CA (on the chapbook "Dysfunctional Family Greeting Cards"): Ms. Kuypers shows us that, in certain circumstances, each person is an enormously authoritative reality to each other person...She is adept at creating an emotional layering.

Dusty Dog Reviews (on the chapbook "Right There, By Your Heart"): The whole project is hip, anti-academic, the poetry of reluctant grown-ups, picking noses in church. An enjoyable romp!

Dusty Dog Reviews, CA (on the chapbook "knife"): These poems document a very complicated internal response to the feminine side of social existence. This tale ("crazy") displays such revelations into the inmate's mind that I tend to believe it. And the poems become increasingly psychologically complex and, ultimately, fascinating and genuinely rewarding.

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Hope Chest in the Attic, by Janet Kuypers

Sulphur and Sawdust, by assorted writers

The Window, by Janet Kuypers

Slate and Marrow, by assorted writers

Close Cover Before Striking, by Janet Kuypers

Autumn Reason, by Sydney Anderson

(woman.), by Janet Kuypers

forthcoming: Infamous In Their Prime, by R. Holt & V. Love Long

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good friends parted

Good friends parted like a winter coat
not quite warm enough
shedding rain and stopping wind
but not the cold
that brings us to hearths alone seeking
voices of comfort in the light
and in the darkness a gentle touch
of hands guiding safely
the shadowed passages of daily life
not quite in despair aging slowly
remembering quickly the smiles
and laughter in the eyes
across tables of food warm
smells rising with glistening
tears of souls touched
with honesty and love
oblivious to others passing
unaware of the secret knowing
of what it means to have
a friend to fill those moments

when we fear to be alone
and strive to be alone with someone
who will not interfere
with the searching and falling
a witness to our experiments
and path finding stumbling
catching just in time to slow
the fall toward anonymity.

boyd miller

amnesia motel

an album of faded pictures
laying on an empty bed
on one side of a dusty room
nobody rents
even though the rates are god-awful good

I give up
[not that I invested much in this to begin
with]

today passes like yesterday
hollow words
empty promises
donuts in a box on the radiator
and an album of faded pictures
remains unopened
[keepsakes left behind]

sepia suits you
delicate lace and silk stockings and
mauve suits with shoulder pads
style is your substance sweetheart
don't fight it

pungent perfumes remind me of you
heart stopping poses no one else can emu-
late
[you really set the hook didn't you?]

so I am in this god-forsaken place
reaching for grasping at a little peace

sidestepping shadows [very fred astaire]
doing nothing I can undo
underneath it all:
desire

[somewhere someone I don't know
takes notes]

underneath the desire: fear

[everyone here knows this is true]

underneath the fear:
emptiness
or hunger

like the pictures in the album
evaporating in the summer heat
wrenched from me in absentia
sympathy proves insufficient

regardless:
everyone who checks in stays

regardless:
some never check in

regardless: everyone ends up here sooner
or later

my memory justifies nothing
taking the easy way out

arguments bury evidence

to no advantage

secrets are revealed on cue

no one here escapes
devastation depression devotion

grandiose stories
told over and over in the bar
even though none of us believes them

[so what if
nobody cares?]

so what if nobody knows better?

regardless:
my album sits on my bed
forgetting nothing remembering all

supposing any of this is real

so what if it's all just another bad dream?
do you care? [did you ever?]

like love: this is never over

mea culpa sweet thing
reneging on history
gets you nowhere
except here

deckard kinder

Helena Wolfe

before i learned better

you'd think that the people that are most like you
are perfect for you
but if you find someone like that
and you're dating someone like that
you'll see
that they now have the same faults as you do
except their faults seem so much worse
and you want to kill them for the faults you have
and you want to crack their head open
and see their brains flowing out in the street

yeah, i know your mood swings, your hatred
your love of life and truth and fairness and art
and your anger
are all as strong as mine
but i'm still going to be hard on you
i'm still going to be hard on you
for being me
before i learned better

anyone good
enough

helena wolfe

i used to think that i was no good
that i was worthless that i meant nothing
and then i got a good job
and then i got me a ton of money
and then i looked in the mirror
and i realized i was gorgeous
and people laughed at my jokes
and people thought i was talented and strong
and now i look around me
and i can't find anyone good enough
and i wonder if i expect too much
but i know for a fact that i deserve more

helena wolfe

the chambered nautilus

by bernadette miller

During her youth, Elizabeth's lover had committed suicide, and she'd never recovered from the shock. She'd secluded herself with Yvette, a French-Canadian cousin, in her late father's Victorian apartment, and struggled there for fourteen years on a meager trust fund and her craft work that Yvette sold to department stores.

One fall afternoon, Yvette set down groceries bought at supermarket sales, and opened a letter. Plump and cuddly with big blue eyes and gray plaits, she was over sixty, yet still retained from convent school a childlike innocence. She rushed to the parlor, waving the letter, and shouted over the electric drill, "Uncle Ralph invited us to Cindy's wedding in upstate New York! Oh, how much fun it would be to go. It's been such a long time..."

Elizabeth clicked off the drill and looked up from the wooden sea gull she was carving. "Yvie, you know I won't budge from here. Besides, we can't afford it."

"Beth, it happened so long ago. It's time to forgive yourself. Uncle Ralph would gladly loan us money for the trip. His daughter will be terribly disappointed if we don't make it."

"Yvie, we've been over this time and again. I couldn't stand a room full of strangers, let alone a wedding. Now I've got to finish this sea gull."

Yvette sighed and returned to the kitchenette.

Trembling, Elizabeth rose and walked to her china cabinet collection near the bay window, as she usually did when upset. It was twilight, the parlor bathed in pink. She gazed at the seashells, miniature alabaster animals, and coral. Removing the chambered nautilus Yvette had given her eight Christmases before, she held it up to the light. She admired the shell's delicate coloring and stroked its pearly smoothness. How lovely it was, dainty and serene, unpressured by events... Starting to relax, she rehung it in the cabinet and returned to her work table near the fireplace.

At suppertime, she began storing her work materials in the sideboard drawer, and heard an ominous thump in the kitchenette. "Yvie!" She hurried through the book-lined hallway, darkened to save money, and found her cousin crumpled on the kitchenette floor.

"Yvie, what's wrong?" Elizabeth said anxiously, lifting the older woman's head onto

her lap. "Are you okay?"

Yvette opened her blue eyes. "I don't know, I must have passed out. I'm sure it's nothing. Don't worry." She rose awkwardly, helped by Elizabeth, and reached for the paring knife on the butcher block counter. "I'll finish the carrots for the salad. You set the work table. I'll be okay."

But apparently she wasn't. The following week, as Elizabeth carved a dolphin, Yvette had another seizure.

"I'd better call an ambulance!" Elizabeth said in the kitchenette. She helped the older woman to rise.

"I feel better already," Yvette said, straightening her house dress. She began scrubbing a pot with steel wool. "I'll be all right."

Elizabeth shook her head. "Yvie, I want you to go to the hospital for tests right now. I'm calling a taxi!"

"We can't afford taxis."

"Well, we'll have to spend the money. We must find out what's wrong."

When the taxi arrived, she hugged Yvette at the door.

"I'm sure it's nothing serious," Yvette said, smiling to reassure Elizabeth. She buttoned the cardigan and pulled on a feathered cloche hat that emphasized her still girlish face and big blue eyes.

"I should go with you, but..."

Yvette smiled. "Well, if you can't face a wedding, you certainly couldn't face a hospital! Don't worry. I'll be back soon."

Elizabeth nodded and returned to her work. Unable to concentrate, she stared through the bay window at the East River far below. She should have gone with Yvette... She shook her head. Strangers would remind her of the past. "I'd better finish the dolphin," she said, and worked for awhile until she realized she wouldn't hear Yvette unlocking the foyer door. Sighing, she clicked off the drill, and thought she heard footsteps echoing in the outside hall. Their neighbor, Mrs. Thompson, might be returning from Europe, as her maid had told Yvette yesterday. Or, perhaps Yvette had dropped her key..

Slowly Elizabeth opened the door and peeked out, wary of Mrs. Whitman, their other neighbor, catching sight of her and starting a conversation. There was no one. Ravel's "Daphnis and Chloe" suddenly flooded the hall from the Stevens' apartment downstairs. She hurried inside and slammed shut the door, but it was too late. She suddenly remembered Michael's Greenwich Village apartment, listening to that same piece of music while he lovingly stroked the silky hair cascading over her shoulders.

"I'll change your father's mind about me," he'd murmured. "As long as I have you, I'll never want another drink."

They kissed, and she nestled contentedly against his shoulder, enveloped by Ravel's haunting music.

Elizabeth reproached herself for breaking her vow never to dwell on the past, and returned to work. When Yvette's key turned in the lock, she hurried to the hall.

"The doctor said it's just old age," Yvette said, hanging her sweater in the hall closet. "I'd better start cooking or we won't have any dinner tonight."

Elizabeth followed her to the kitchenette and watched her cousin grate cabbage. "Well, old age or not, something's causing the problem!" Brow furrowed with worry, she returned to the parlor and spread a cloth over the work table. She distributed her mother's Limoges plates, the remaining antiques after Yvette sold the rest to pay bills. Upset about memories of Michael after so many years, she stopped and removed the chambered nautilus. She stroked the coils, yearning to curl up inside, protected from pain.

During supper, Elizabeth shoved aside the half-filled bowls of vegetable soup and coleslaw.

Yvette, serving tea, flashed an encouraging smile.

"Maybe we should skip Pou Belle tonight?" It was her pet name for the basement garbage. "The Whitmans are away, but if we run into Mrs. Thompson, we might have to explain why we're rummaging through other people's discards."

"No, we'll go down after supper. We don't want rich neighbors running our life."

Yvette chuckled. "Last year, Mrs. Whitman threw out that faded velvet chair, and we got fifty dollars for it! Then, Mrs. Stevens had to redecorate, too, and discarded those hooked rugs—just before our carpet disintegrated. My, what a wonderful Christmas that was..."

Elizabeth smiled at her cousin's wistfulness. "This year will be even better. Well, if you've finished eating, let's go."

They got the flashlight, and took the elevator to the basement. Hurrying down a corridor toward the large, unlit room at the rear, they deposited their garbage bags in the corner bin. Then, while Yvette kept a lookout for visitors, Elizabeth guided her flashlight about the dark, and spotted an open carton of spices.

"I can certainly use that!" Yvette said, pleased.

They lugged their loot upstairs, intending to sneak it into the apartment, but Mrs. Thompson stood at her open door, sandwiched between suitcases. They smiled sheepishly at the neighbor with her sleek blonde chignon.

"Someone left perfectly good spices in Pou Belle," Yvette said, squashing her nervousness.

"Pou Belle?" Mrs. Thompson looked disdainfully at the carton. "Oh, you mean the garbage."

"Exactly," Yvette said, flashing her most charming smile. "That's what my mother in

Quebec called the discards."

Elizabeth, deeply embarrassed, muttered, "We probably shouldn't have taken it, but nobody wanted it, so--"

"It's a good haul!" Yvette interrupted, and turned with a conspiratorial whisper toward Mrs. Thompson. "You won't tell anyone, will you, dear?"

"No, of course not."

The women hurried with the carton to the kitchenette where they unloaded the spices. While Yvette finished in the kitchenette, Elizabeth read a novel borrowed from the library by Yvette. Her heart leaped when she heard another thump. This time Yvette had bumped her head on the baseboard near the sink.

Elizabeth trembled with anxiety as she bent over the older woman. "Yvie, something's wrong! I'll have you stay at the hospital for complete tests."

Yvette rose with Elizabeth's help. "We can't afford it."

"I'll ... find a way to pay for it."

"How?"

Elizabeth swallowed hard. "Well, my craft work won't cover it. I'll ... get a job."

"You mean regular work?"

"Yes, Yvie, I'll do it. I'll do anything to make sure you're okay." She nodded, more to convince herself than Yvette. "As soon as the tests are paid for, I can quit."

"We need the money, but if it's too hard on you..."

"Well, let's see how it works out." Elizabeth patted Yvette's arm. "I bet you forgot this is tv night. There's a good movie--Dark Victory with Bette Davis."

Yvette exclaimed, "I did forget!"

They hurried to the darkened parlor where Elizabeth plugged in the set opposite the sofa, and they settled down to watch. Elizabeth's gaze shuttled from the movie to her cousin, who kept smiling to reassure her.

The next day, after brushing her teeth in the musty green bathroom near Yvette's room, Elizabeth repinned her graying auburn hair behind her ears, and stared at her image. At fifty she had no wrinkles, just a sagging jaw, yet she felt much older. She tucked in her shirttail and

straightened the baggy slacks. She had managed to look as unattractive and unfeminine as possible--ever since Michael died.

She remembered coming home late, and her father storming from his room. "Don't tell me you've seen that drunkard again after I forbade it?"

Fighting tears her father considered a weakness, she said, "Michael hasn't had a drop for two years, not since meeting me."

He'd nodded, his face softening. "But the problem's always there, isn't it?" he said

gently. "Elizabeth, you deserve better in life than worrying about your husband taking another drink. How long do you think your love would last?"

She remained silent, torn by his logic. Week after week he'd urged that Michael was no good for her, until gradually, insidiously, he convinced her to change her mind. If only Mom had still been alive, maybe she wouldn't have sent Michael that terrible letter...

And then the call from Yvette, hesitant and tearful, "Oh, Beth, I'm... so sorry to tell you this, but Michael... I just found out from his neighbor... poor Michael shot himself in the heart. Beth, dear, if there's anything I can do..."

Now, Elizabeth felt a stab of anguish and shook her head. No, Yvette was right--it was over a long time ago! She must get a job, for Yvette's sake. Maybe being among people wouldn't be as painful as before...

To calm herself, she removed the chambered nautilus, and held it up to the light from the bay window; the colors shimmered with rainbow intensity. Turning the shell, she pictured the mollusk creating its lovely, hidden chambers, safely inhabiting one after another until it finally died.

The next morning, wrapped in an old robe, she walked through the sunny parlor; clinking noises emanated from the kitchenette where Yvette fried eggs.

"Feeling better?" Elizabeth said.

Yvette murmured, "I'm fine, dear."

Nodding with relief, Elizabeth carried buttered toast and strawberry jam to the parlor table. Afterwards, she returned to work. She bent over the dolphin to attach a tiny brass ring so it could be worn as a pendant, and shivered when the mantel clock struck eleven. Time for Yvette to leave for her tests.

"Beth, I'm ready," Yvette said, sticking her head in the door. It had grown colder outside. She wore a plaid winter coat, leather boots, a black fur hat, and carried an expensive purse: gifts from Pou Belle.

Elizabeth nodded and fought tears as they embraced.

"I'll be all right," Yvette said. "Probably just nerves, worrying about money, and you being so isolated in the apartment. I'll bet there's nothing wrong at all."

Elizabeth daubed at her eyes. "I hope so. Please call as soon as you can."

After Yvette left, Elizabeth played Mozart on the cassette player Yvette had given her several birthdays past, and again removed the chambered nautilus. "Don't let Yvie die," she whispered, holding up the shell. "Sixty-seven isn't old. It can't be time yet..." Turning the shell, she admired the delicate spiral architecture and felt strangely calm; somehow Yvie would be all right.

To occupy her mind, she dusted and vacuumed Yvette's bedroom that had been her father's, and then cleaned her small bedroom adjoining the parlor, trying not to glance at

the bottom drawer containing Michael's letter; she'd never replied to it. She wadded the dust cloth into a tight ball. She had obligations now, she couldn't stay tied to the past.

The next day, after breakfast, she pondered job possibilities. Waitressing was impractical; she lacked experience. Nor could she sell anything. She walked to the bathroom, through the book-laden hallway, and returned to

the table to study *The New York Times* classified. A bookstore ad caught her eye. She could sell books-utilize her fine boarding-school education and her Smith College degree. She'd always loved to read, encouraged by her mother, a book editor for several years before she died of cancer. But what about appropriate clothes? Baggy trousers and a man's shirt wouldn't do.

She removed an old blue skirt from the bedroom closet, and stroked the soft wool. The hem sagged in places. She basted it from Yvette's sewing kit, and then tugged on a pale blue Lady Arrow blouse with wide lace collar. A stain, probably catsup, appeared faintly near the bottom. She remembered wearing that skirt and blouse the day Michael died. Trembling, she closed her eyes, said aloud, "I'm not going to get upset!" and buttoned the front. She frowned at her mirror image. The clothes, though old, looked presentable; she couldn't use the excuse that she had nothing to wear.

Reluctantly she donned Yvette's cashmere coat, felt beret, and kidskin purse, also gifts of Pou Belle. Then, in the parlor, she gazed awhile at the chambered nautilus, and finally left.

Downstairs in the lobby, she was startled by the new uniformed doorman Yvette hadn't mentioned, and wondered what happened to old Fred who'd been there since her father died.

"Hello, ma'am," the young blond fellow said politely and held open the door.

"Uh...hello!" She felt awkward and stepped outside into the harsh bright sunshine flooding Beekman Place. Blinking in the glare, she fought the rising panic that boiled in her stomach, and walked slowly past canopied apartment buildings to the bookstore around the corner on First Avenue. Fur-clad women reeled their dogs on unwinding leashes instead of the old leather ones. And a new type of grocery had replaced the corner coffee shop. A glimpse inside revealed orientals tending hot and cold buffet stands between wall shelves of canned and baked goods; crates outside bulged with fresh tomatoes, melons, mangoes, and bananas, footed by cut flowers. She lingered over the roses perfuming the cold air.

Then, much too soon, she arrived at the small bookstore that had advertised for help. She hesitated and timidly entered, her gaze darting past stuffed shelves, overflowing tables, and piles on the carpet. Books were everywhere. She cringed at the chaos and yearned to flee but forced herself to stay for Yvette's sake. Still, she'd never had a regular job. Why would anyone hire her?

And it was already afternoon, past lunch time. They'd probably gotten someone by now. She'd nearly surrendered to the impulse to leave when the middle-aged lady at the cash register, called out, "May I help you? If you don't see the book you want I'm sure it's here somewhere. We have an extensive selection."

Elizabeth, swiveling, flushed with embarrassment. "Uh, I'm here to apply...for...uh...the job."

The lady, smiling, stepped from behind the register and introduced herself as the owner. With her feathery gray upsweep she peered at Elizabeth through large spectacles. "You could read here if you've done your work and there's no business. I can't pay much. We don't get lots of customers like the big chains."

Elizabeth, still fighting the urge to run out, mentally calculated how much she'd need to pay the hospital charges. They discussed wages, which would suffice. "Well..I love books," she said, her awkwardness remaining. "I'll...do my best, Miss--"

"Call me Bev. I'll be delighted to have a knowledgeable helper-finally."

She mentioned hours and lunch period, and it was settled. Elizabeth would start the next morning.

Relieved the ordeal was over, she returned to the apartment in time to get Yvette's call from the hospital.

"Beth, that's wonderful! If I'm okay, I'll try to get work, too."

"No, if you're not ill, there's no sense making yourself sick by working. It's better if I do it."

"Yes, dear," Yvette said.

The next day, Elizabeth nervously reported to the book store, and was pleased at how pleasant Bev was and how the time flew by. She felt useful when the customers, such as elderly Mrs. Steinberg, relied on her judgement, as if Elizabeth were a final authority on literature.

"Darling, my granddaughter is studying acting, and I want some funny Shakespeare plays to give her," Mrs. Steinberg said. "I want to read them first, but sad stories always make me cry. What can you suggest?"

Elizabeth climbed the wall ladder and selected *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Measure for Measure*. "I think you'll enjoy these, and so will your granddaughter." She slipped the books into a paper bag.

Mrs. Steinberg watched her ring up the cash register. "I never read Shakespeare but I figure maybe it's time to start." She smiled. "Thank God that Bev hired you. The last person helping her couldn't tell anybody anything about nothing ! "

Elizabeth grinned.

When Yvette was ready to leave the hospital the next day, Elizabeth took time off

that afternoon to meet her on the front steps. On the way home, she described Bev and the interesting customers to Yvette, who nodded and smiled. They walked slowly along leaf-strewn streets, Elizabeth enjoying the cool fall fragrance.

At home, she began carving a miniature seahorse. She felt content, listening to chamber music while sweet aromas wafted through the parlor. Yvette baked an orange cake for the special occasion of her return home and Elizabeth's job.

Elizabeth bent greedily over the steak and vegetables, paid for with her new paycheck, and said, "I'll give Bev the seahorse I carved. She might like that."

"Oh, I'm sure she would."

Several days later, during dinner, Yvette watched her cousin eat for awhile, then put down her fork. "I have a confession to make..." She hesitated.

Elizabeth waited, her lips pinching together with worry.

"I...lied about being sick," Yvette said finally.

"What do you mean?"

"Well...there's nothing wrong with me. I...did it to get you out of the apartment. I wanted you to realize the past is finished. Please don't be mad..."

Elizabeth stared at her, an anger rising from the pit of her stomach, but then she felt relieved that Yvette was all right. She said softly, "I'm just glad there's nothing wrong with you."

After supper, she tugged on Mrs. Whitman's discarded suede jacket. "I'm going up to the roof for some air."

Yvette looked up anxiously. "You won't quit your job now?"

Elizabeth hesitated. "No, we can use the money. And I like working there."

Yvette smiled and returned to The Daily News, her head snapping back and forth as she sought the money-saving coupons.

In the outside hall, Elizabeth climbed the few steps, ducked under the doorway, and crossed the asphalt roof. The weather was refreshing; the air clean and crisp. Elbows propped on the rail, she gazed at the distant bridge twinkling with car lights, and at the silvered water below, where a barge floated eerily by. What a lovely scene, she thought. If only she were seeing it with Michael...

She trembled, and reproached herself again. Then, she pictured the beautiful chambered nautilus, that fragile, empty shell, and quoted Oliver Wendell Holmes' poem...

"Let each new temple, nobler than the last, shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast..."

Pausing, she scanned the stars dotting the night sky, and suddenly felt that Michael had long since forgiven her. She smiled at her new calmness, as if her soul, outgrowing the nautilus's protective chambers, were finally free.

use what you had

i've never had regrets
but i keep wondering
why i gave up what i had
for you, to be with you

if all you were going to do
was fuck me over
and then put me out on
the line to dry

i keep thinking of all the
hell i went through
with the last guy, but at
least he wanted me,

at least he had a big dick
and could get me off
(i've wanted to tell you
you had a small cock,

and you didn't even know how
to use what you had, but then
again, you've never been in a
relationship for more than two

months, how could you ever
learn how to satisfy a woman,
you cock-sucker?) and although
my past relationship was still

dysfunctional at least he
wanted to make that commitment
with me, and i threw that
away so that i could go

on this stupid roller-
coaster with you, the man who
offered me in some ways no
more than and in some ways even

less than my ex, so that you
could then after all this crap
throw me away like i am some
sort of piece of trash that was

a little too big for the garbage
disposal but needed to be removed
nonetheless. oh, and i just
keep thinking that it's so ironic

that i was looking for something
more and all i could get was a
bunch of nothing and i hate you
but at least i know now that

you have a really small cock, and
that you don't even know how to
use it, and that you have to live with
that. that you're stuck with that.

helena wolfe

soulmates or not

i close my eyes,
seduced by magical thinking
and tactile daydreams
of your soft skin.

i know this may be cheating, but
for a split season i roam
to the alternate service area
of my tiny genius.

your specter is there,
as is mine
calling to me
expansive warm and blue.

soulmates or not, truth is
each breath takes us the
distance of the universe
from each other.

doris popovich

alone and I

Alone and I are partners
Alone waits for me at night
Consumes by body and my life
Alone makes love to me
Wraps it's legs arms and legs
Around me as I sleep
Alone understands my moods
And consoles me when I cry
Alone will be my friend
Until the day I die

rachel crawford

Mackenzie Silver

i'm always the one

i'm always the one
who has to
pick up the pieces

all i've done
is wipe your noses
and clean your rooms

and now i have to
clean up my life
and i have
no one to help me

mackenzie
silver



sequoia

burn through me

now that i've seen you
i don't even care
if you're with her
because now that i've seen you
i know you don't love her

and i know it for a fact
because you look at me
and burn through me
that way we did at the start

and if after so many years
we still feel that burn
imagine how many years we have
together
to feel alive

sydney anderson

saving yourself

all of that time
when you could have been with me
you were busy
saving yourself with your religion

when weren't you
really
in actuality
saving yourself from your religion
by saving yourself from me

sydney anderson



s & j

Janet Kuypers

a woman talking about her rapist friend

He was my friend, and we had been
through a lot together, our psychological
ups and downs,

but he mixed drinks exceptionally well
at his college frat parties, and his
ice-blue eyes

always spoke the truth to me. It's amazing
to think that the only reason we ever met
was because one day

he wore a turtleneck that perfectly
matched his eyes, and I had to tell him.
I don't know why

he put up with my mood swings, with my
self-destructive social life and man-hating,
normally he didn't

care about women, never gave their opinions
much thought, just tried to get them
drunk at parties,

maybe he knew that and that's why he
listened to me. Then for a few years
our friendship

drifted, we didn't see each other much,
I heard through the grapevine that he was
failing in school.

Then one day, out of the blue, he comes
over and he has two black eyes. And he
says to me

that when he was in the parking garage
two guys came and beat him up, and one
of them said,

you raped my girlfriend. And then he looked
at me and said, and you know, looking back,
he was right.

I raped her. And I know he wanted sym-
pathy, he wanted to hear me say something,
but I couldn't.

And he said, I know this has to be hard for
you to hear, but I wanted to tell you. I know
it was wrong.

A part of me wanted to hate him. A part of
me thought that if he was my friend I would
be condoning

what he did. And a part of me thought that
our friendship made him realize what he
actually had done.

I tried to be there for him. I wasn't much
good at it. Eventually, he moved away.
I didn't try

to lose touch with him. But it's just that a
part of me is still trying to figure out if I
can be his friend.

Sometimes you just lose touch with some-
one, sometimes that's all you can do.

janet kuypers

fossils

Dear Jay Parini,

Thank you for the book
Which I had wanted as soon as I saw it
Was called Anthracite County, so excuse me
For taking so long to answer; Tim Wickland was
Tardy in sending it, and I was even more so
In getting it back to you, for metaphors
Are fearful things and sometimes feelings get
Too complex for the plain prose Monsieur Jordain
Was glad to find he had been speaking all his life
And in which Darwin's bulldog, T. H. Huxley, explained
The great mysteries to eager workers with his piece
Of carpenter's chalk and some magic lantern slides;
Poems are, of course, obsolete just like the slide rule
With which Tim still figures taxes and the silver
Tray on which elegant Arlinda serves high tea,
But sometimes too much collides for ordered prose.

I telephoned Karleen, my mother-in-law, in her double-wide
Among the branched saguaros in Tucson's glare
And told her I'd been gifted with some hard black
Letters from a Scranton raising, although you now
Live near our friends on Weybridge Hill among the turning
Leaves so admired by Asian tourists and the roads
Marked FROST HEAVES in the Spring because the "Something
There is that doesn't love a wall" is a pun I did not
Get until I paced that ground, but I have never plunged
Into anything more dark than the field trip mine at our
Museum of Science and Industry just a few miles
From where I write, and on my native ground in
The Cherokee Strip our dinosaurs, discreetly decaying,
Made natural gas which did not beg time my father's

Arrow collars, although the lowering dust
 Made ample nightmares, also mined for art
 By Steinbeck and friends, whom you have chronicled.

So I asked Karleen about the French chateau given
 To a town already stuffed with fossils as a shell not
 Really suited for a library but which her husband,
 Great grandfather to my grandchildren, guided
 With some skill for six years penning Dewey
 Decimals in white ink on spines you may recall, for
 A dozen years later you must have been a stack hound,
 A bookworm they called you then, fondling thick bindings,
 Then burrowing toward something as real as the press
 Of a fern extinct for a million years on the coal face,
 Coveting the dirty books locked behind glass,
 Trying on styles like sports coats off the rack,
 Glorying in this anarchist heaven with open shelves
 Where the front of the people's labor is read by all.

Alert Karleen, who is ninety, disremembers
 The name of that book-crammed chateau,
 Aldrich maybe or Allbrick or I suggested
 Maybe Alberich after Wagner's niebelung,
 And she told me the niebelungs had left
 The central building upright, but one of the branches
 Called Providence, she thinks, had crazy floors,
 And once she descended from Nay Og Park between
 The time the Coral Sea was refloored with fuselages
 And pearl-eyed skulls and the time when stiff corpses
 Served as sleds near Stalingrad, with her was
 The thin-shanked, redheaded ten year-old
 Who has been my wife for two third of our lives
 And the good librarian whom you never met,
 For he left Scranton the year that you were born
 And died before I had a chance to meet him either,
 And a dead but legendary and unforgotten dog
 Who slid forward across the varnished planks

And yelped in alarm, for Scranton was an ant hill,
And you could not forget that you lived on
Compressed past ages that made hard coal
So that Phoebe Snow could ride the Lackawanna
All in white from the veins which
Tangled like the very eyebrows of John L
Beneath the gray and leaning houses and
Trolleys filled with men with a dried-sweat stink,
Pale under black face who yearned to smell of
Stogies and rye whiskey and think impure thoughts
Of lispng Emma Matso who had made it to Hollywood
As Lizabeth Scott, but mostly they were family men
Who got married in church and sat proudly
At first communions wishing their eyebrows could
Come clean, not even guessing that suburbanites
Would turn their backs on black anthracite before
Their granddaughters received the sacrificial wafer.

I hope we soon meet face to face sitting
On Tim's front porch with elegant hors d'ouvres
From Arlinda's silver tray, telling some stretchers
About hanging out in libraries, recalling
That ancient Gennan film about a cave-in
And miners who smashed frontiers to save
Their comrades, and, of course, watching namesakes
Shooting hoops in the driveway, and now and then
Raising our glasses to the fossils, a greenhouse
That once existed in Saginaw, a government camp
In Arvin, and all the language in the coal seams
And the chalk beds, for, like old Huxley,
I believe in fossils absolutely.

j. quinn brisben

sleeping postures

by christophe brunski

I paused too abruptly inside the doorway, and the hush of air closing in with the glass pane that supported the perennial Come in! We're open! nudged me curtly in the back and completed my entrance into Ronnie's PayDay Diner. The bells sprinkled over my head like mistletoe run by a clock and my weighty jacket seemed to expand in the wave of agreeable heat.

"Just you?" A waitress in that famous red-plaid waitress form, blue name-tagged Sally, shining, smiling, dutifully radiant yet down-to-earth, and proffering a wire hanger for my ragged jacket.

"Yes." I was quite sure no one was joining me on this particular morning, a morning plugged into the middle of a frigid winter. No invisible ghosts, no psychological specters, no assistant vagabonds. It was a solidarity I welcomed. I took the hanger with a nodded thanks, and hung up my jacket on the battered rack just aside the door.

Sally the waitress led me through a frightful labyrinth of chairs and tables and left me in the safety of a small square table by the window and an automatic cup of coffee. I sat and let myself be introduced to the atmosphere. The tabletop was somewhat dull and tarnished seemed not to reflect, but to absorb and small secret swellings of light here and there. I began to knead my closed fist on the aluminum edging of the table, thinking about the ironic way such nondescript things have of becoming so vividly etched in the mind and memory. My hands were still so numb that the temperature of the thing was totally ambiguous to me. I was thinking that I should have worn gloves, that I couldn't feel a thing like this.

I looked around me. It was the very atmospheric complacency of this place, like any other roadside diner, that elicited my tendency to magnify details into icons. Looking out the windows, what struck me most was the flow of tanker trucks passing on the highway. Well, not the trucks themselves. It was the distance between my table at the window and the road, not a very long way, by any means, but its emptiness highlighted the passing of these trucks and the sun was positioned so that the light was reflected off the mirror-like tanks when they passed. So many hurdled by in rapid succession as to lend the image of diurnal stars soaring past the window, that magical canvas of moving pictures.

I sat quietly with myself and listened to the diatribes and explications from inside myself.

Christophe Brunski

I wondered what I looked like and imagined the classic scenario of a director sitting like a misplaced star in a theater of empty seats, listening to a few candid actresses dramatizing on-stage. (Figuring the voice of reason just had to be female...) I thought that thus far, all my destinations had been starting points or mid-way markers. All one can look for is a place to start, it seems most of the time. You can travel the world(s) fifty times over before realizing you were already there. All the hours of premeditation in the muscles around the eyes, and it takes a fourth of a second to blink the lids open and see. And it's a world of mirrors, because it's all from within. Of course, it takes a hell of a journey to figure that out. One of the actresses threw up her arms in philosophical exasperation: Ten thousand days to find the ground beneath your feet! And another five hundred to believe you've done it! And on my yellow notepad I penciled in, line after line:

Another five hundred to believe you've done it...

Another five hundred to believe you've done it...

Another -

I was called away from my enchantment when suddenly a girl placed herself alongside my table. "May I please?" she asked me. I told her the pleasure was mine. Seemingly she had come out of nowhere yet I figured that she must have been seated somewhere shortly before I arrived, because she had carried a menu with her to my table and I couldn't recall hearing any more ringing mistletoe.

"Thank you. Really," she said. "I was lonely over at my table," she said, although I figured there was more to it than that. Her chair pulled out, her chair pulled in, up close to the table. Truly, I made no attempt to return to whatever half- or wholly-engaging thoughts had previously taken me. I didn't. For some reason, I welcomed the distraction. It's necessary to be drawn out of oneself from time to time.

Her name, she told me, was Meredith. I instantly expected daisies or something to sprout from her smile; her natural speaking voice was really quite pleasing, but when she injected her streams of social gaiety it rode a treble fluctuation, and if graphically registered would simulate the Himalayan skyline.

She said, "I love the winter. Do you love the winter?"

"I enjoy the cold."

Her exemplary posture slackened a little, and the supportive base of her elbows on the table widened, and she lowered herself a bit more, resting just short of total relaxation, the stitches in her knit green sweater stretching with her smile. "Me too."

I heard a Ready to order? from stage left and Meredith asked for some milk and juice and something else while I scurried through the menu, which I hadn't even opened. I can never decide. The eyes turned to me. "Same here," I said, closing the laminated wings of the menu. Sally with the name tag left and I leaned forward across the table.

"What am I having for breakfast?"

She laughed joyously, which lightened my repast-related tension a bit. "Milk, toast, and

OJ. I hope you're not too hungry!"

I was starving. I told her, "I guess I'll order something else in a little while. . ."

"Yeah, you can always do that."

God, her teeth were white. But I found myself drawn back to the window. I could feel her staring at the side of my face. This led me to resume my study of the passing oil tankers with increased vigor. But I wasn't thinking. Not at all.

"What are you looking at?"

"Nothing, really."

She let a moment slide by in quiet before asking me if I was the type of person who likes just to sit and meditate to myself.

"I guess I am, to an extent," I stumbled, "But what is that supposed to mean, you know?"

"Yeah, I know. But that alone, I mean your... resistance, there, signals that there's something going on in your mind. Are you the artistic type?"

I raised my hand to a slight altitude of objection but she continued, "No, I'm serious. Are you?"

"I don't know..." I hated this type of conversation, the type I held with myself all the time... "What good is the artist who thinks he's an artist? Doesn't that take away from it a bit? Doesn't that slightly falsify the whole thing just a little?"

In decidedly quick measures she took her elbows off the table. From a purple backpack which I hadn't noticed sitting nearby on the floor like an obedient dog, she drew a few small cards. She spread them out in front of me, saying, "You'll like these," and I surveyed what was a four-pointed fan composed of the glossy Kunstiarten one buys in the gift shops at museums. (Oh, I had been there.) Two Monets, a Degas, a Van Gogh.

"Oh, god," I thought. "It's always the Impressionists..."

Her finger tapped the Monet. "The Flowering Arches," she said.

I refrained from comment.

So she continued. "See how the edges are all, like, obscured and indefinite?"

I nodded my head, somehow, barely moving, hardly able.

"That's because Monet had. . . cataracts, or something, before he died. "

Thanks Darling, I knew that. I felt my internal organs settle in for a long and drawn-out lecture on the typical information sought out by every Girl-Who-Likes-Paintings; information that fit nicely on index cards, and, if one was lucky, could be recited in front of the actual canvas while men with dark braided hair sauntered past and finished every third sentence in French.

She planted her forefinger on the Van Gogh and told me to observe the manic yellow halos around the hanging lights of a sinister night cafe. "Yellow- it's principal to all his master works. And you know, yellow has long been the color most associated with madness. He used to frequent these types of places in the midst of his lifelong sadness... And considering the turmoil in his friendship with Gauguin, it's entirely clear that - "

She went on. I was forced to choke myself on her eager verbal porridge, siRing through repulsive words which, to me, seemed to constitute a kind of confession, on her part, that the words Essence and Feeling were not in her vocabulary, because within those academic games of soul-less Simon Says they were never mentioned- both are too easy to spell and too hard to define.

Perhaps what I did not say had stenciled itself across my forehead, for as I completed these thoughts Merredith stopped abruptly and corralled her miniature gallery. I felt sorry. To interrupt whatever I might have said to this effect was the waitress, again, setting down a grapefruit ordered some minutes previously by my companion. Sally offered a squawking apology for the delay and fluttered off someplace else. Merredith began to saw apart the yellow fruit. I stared at its pale rind sitting without revolt in a glass bowl, and I imagined how much poor Vincent would have simply loved somebody just to talk to, and here I was in the presence of such a person, a surprise gift, and I had nothing nice enough to say. At the grill, another breakfast was being prepared, the grease sizzling and hissing a somber culinary applause. I coughed, because I had nothing else to do.

For some time, we let the din of the place do the talking. She played along with our silence, letting the symphonic dropping of plates, the swinging of the kitchen door, and the tide of other voices replace our own. Obviously she found it a trifle morbid, but there was little I could do. Anyway, I was telling myself, The mentality we share as human beings seems inevitably divided into two critical bodies: One led the mind when actually thinking, the other responsible for engagements in conversation, and they only very rarely crossed paths and produced the much-aspired-to by-product known as eloquence. Of these two critical mental bodies, most people are one or the other. Merredith and I would no doubt be drawn at opposite ends of the chart. Then why the silence? I wondered. I had always thought polarities were a perfect match. It seemed overall that she was a very warm person, so I tried to prohibit my mind(s) from ruining that. I watched her eat.

Her spoon hung poised over the bowl like the needle of a record player, about to land again on the threadbare vinyl it had already decoded and translated thousands of times. But the tip of the spoon, much to its own surprise, clanged bell-like on the table.

Your eyes are red," she said, not looking at me, then continuing the autopsy of her grapefruit. "So," she asked me, like a journalist starting over from scratch, "What is it that you do, anyway?"

In the most concise language possible I broke the news that I was a so-called writer. I hoped to avoid any lengthy replies, analyses, monologues, or questions. I was bored with myself.

"Writing! Magnificent! I knew you were an artist." She wiped her hands on her napkin. "So, you can bring what you think into reality... That must endow you with a certain freedom. Doesn't it make you feel free?"

"Not quite." I said that it was up to the insane to control their private piece of what the rest of the world dubbed reality. I said that there was no trap worse than the ability to play God. But somewhere in between the moment I took a short breath to say this and the moment I shut my mouth again, softly, I had changed my mind. I was there, perfectly there, and perfectly within my right mind. Yet hadn't I brought this about? This morning was entirely of my own hand. If things seemed to run themselves, to be happening to me instead of the inverse, then this was caused by my failure to realize beforehand that I was as free to create as a child with a shard of glass etching a cloud into a field of hard-packed dirt.

"Not quite? You don't think so?" she said, reading my face and taking a sugar packet from its little tray by the napkins. "It seems that we sometimes believe something a little less after saying it. "

Boy, do we. I thought about this as I watched the stream of sugar cascade into the yellow empty rind, piling into absorbent dunes, sinking. She crumpled the edge of the packet as one might fold the ear of a dog.

She stared straight at me. "The problem with you writers is that you never say anything."

"Untrue," I protested. "Plus - what, then, would we have to write about?"

"You see, then? It's back to pad and paper. You may say all the right things, but you never DO it!"

A statement to which all my former teachers and lovers would eagerly attest. If she was right, she was right. Writers disembowel themselves onto the pages that they and others hide behind. She told me that words were my greatest aegis. She had a point, although arguments are so easily inverted... I had by now no doubt that should one invade her homely and falsely erudite bookshelves, any given volume could be opened to reveal ball-point effigies labeling Irony with a star and Foreshadowing with another. How I dread these blotches of ink thrown across the sun.

But all this time, my concerns were gradually drawing themselves back to the level of the fact that I was dead tired, and at any rate glad to have somebody to talk to. Our breakfast was drawing to a close. Something had to come next, I thought.

"Where do you go now?" she asked.

Where do I go now? I thought. I shrugged. It was my way of asking her permission to join her. "I'm following you," I announced.

"Oh, good. I do enjoy your company. Where do you want to go, then, eh?"

"As I said, I'm following you, which means you pick a direction."

"Okay." She smiled as we rose from the table, spilling down random bills and coins as we went. Whatever we had left had to be enough, we figured, so I swept up her purple backpack from the ground, slung it over my shoulder, and we left, plan-less and carefree.

My legs felt oddly buoyant atop the crush of the parking lot gravel underfoot. I watched my legs cross this gray plateau. In a second I was moved by the clarity of which I saw the

rocks scatter under and away from the soles of my shoes. Through the thin layer of tears the cold wind brought to my eyes when it blew, they appeared more defined, more crisp and superbly aware of their own borders than I ever could have imagined them, or anything. I plundered my way to the passenger side door of her car, colored pewter and polished by the sun, and I paused there, waiting for her to unlock the door. Dazzled by such a enormous sense of random perception, I managed to drop the now-symbolic purple backpack onto the ground, spilling half its contents onto the stones. Merredith's fragments of the Louvre, a lip-stick, three pens, and a legal pad with some notes tumbled to the ground.

I stared at the pad, hurriedly waiting for the trigger to activate my memory. What was it? What was it? What -

Ten thousand days to find the ground beneath your feet!

And another five hundred to believe to believe you've done it!

Another five hundred to believe...

"Oh, my God," I said.

Merredith was about to get into the car. "What? What's the matter? Just pick the stuff up. What, did something break, or something?"

"No," I said, "Everything's fine. I've got it." I gathered her stuff and zipped the bag.

Merredith leaned over from the driver's side and unlocked the door. It was pleasant inside, the cool kept out and the sunlight kept in. As Merredith's body rolled through the movement of retrieving her keys from the pocket of her jeans, I thought I felt a downy whip of her hair brush my cheek. I don't know how this could have happened. She was really nowhere near me then, yet, deciding that I had not imagined it, I felt three times over at peace with the world. How can that be? How can the edifice of Concern, Question, Thought, and Reflection be so simply leveled by a strand of hair?

The car stalled once. We left the parking lot of Ronnie's Payday Diner behind another tanker truck. Even with their growing intensity, my thoughts were receding into silent horizons.

(We are physical creatures who must always return to our physical nature. At beginning and end there is nothing, except that we are human, and even to question such a thing is already to wander amidst a circular garden from which we must always return, in one lifetime or another, stumbling and dropping our bags, stepping back into the collective home, found and re-entered at the moment we stop our searching, and remember simply to sense our own existence...)

I let this voice speak inside me, and I listened, and coupled with Merredith's prating, it formed a marvelous duet. She spoke again in her amusing half-textbook dialect, which my ears were learning to digest without repulsion. Her speech to me sounded slurred and worked like an elixir, two invisible hands laying back my head to lean against the window, where it rested, untouched by the jolts thrown up from the street through my body. Like a gull born above the clouds and given ten seconds to live, I dove into my sleep.