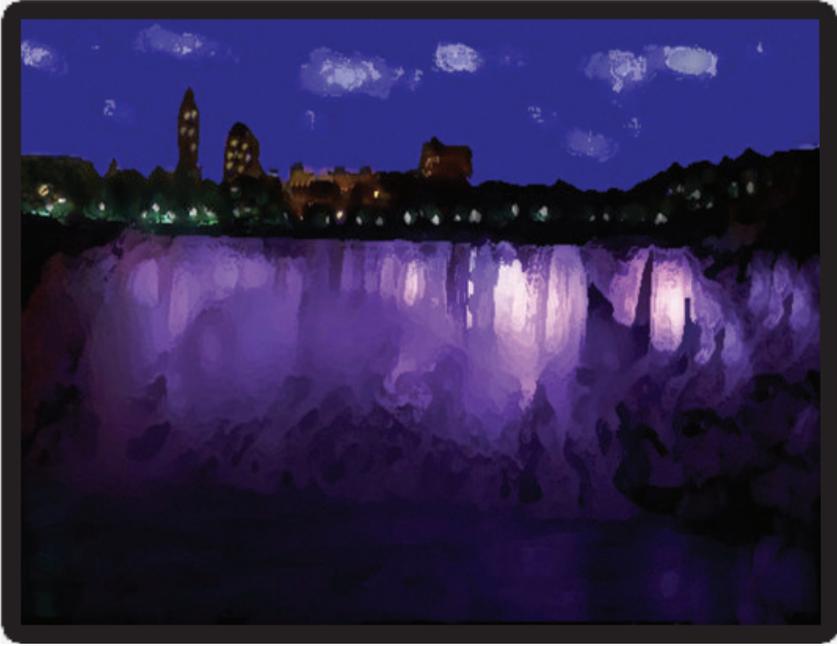




Salmon Creek Journal 2009



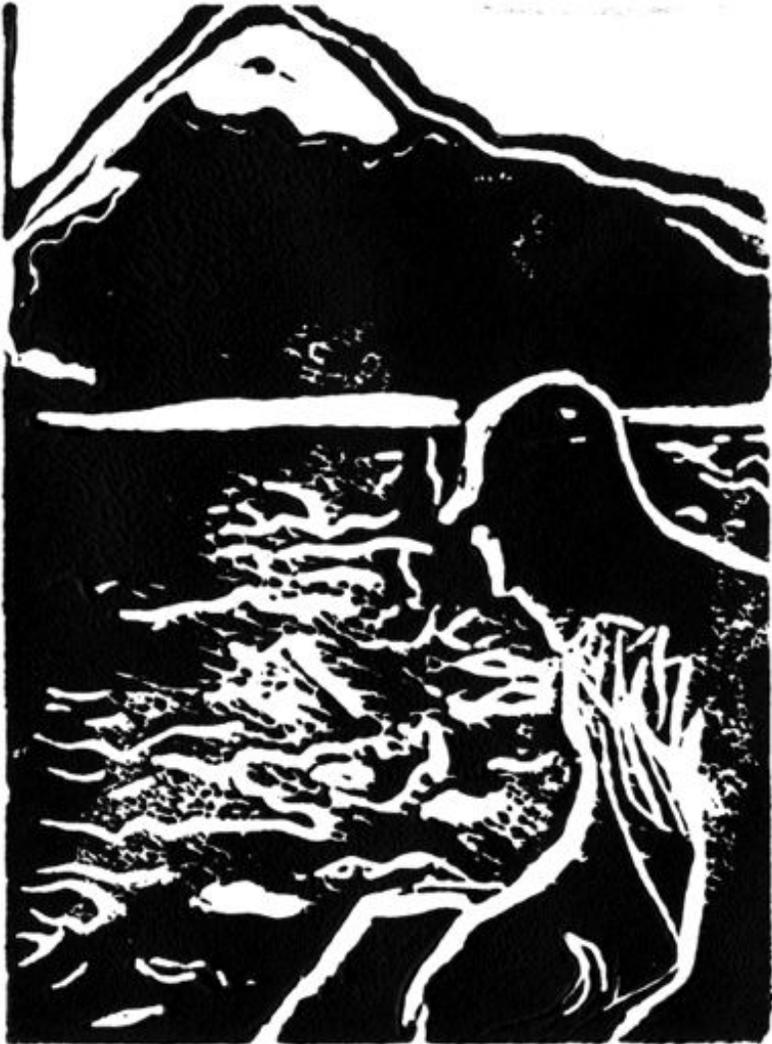
I've been thinking
that if I fail to reach
Legendary Status,
it's certainly not
a lack on my part,

I blame
the inattentive.

COVER ART:
"AMERICAN FALLS - NIAGRA FALLS" BY MICHAEL DUNN
"2009 EDITOR'S CHOICE AWARD - VISUAL ART"

FLY LEAF:
"BY THE WAY" BY BYRON NALOS

ALL ORIGINAL CARVED WOODCUT PRINTS (SEE BELOW):
SARA NEWTON, POETRY EDITOR



-SALMON CREEK JOURNAL-

2009



**WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
VANCOUVER**

**A. K. HUSEBY
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

**SARA NEWTON: POETRY EDITOR WILL SPEARS: PROSE EDITOR
CARA COTTINGHAM: LAYOUT DESIGNER NIKKI FARLAND: VISUAL ART EDITOR
FACULTY ADVISOR: WENDY DASLER JOHNSON, PH. D.**

-TABLE OF CONTENTS-

A. Denny

Lucy24

A.K. Huseby

The Fat Lady at Eight22

Byron Nalos

Jackpot2

At Moulton Falls42

Boston Terriers46

Bath.....61

Cara Cottingham

Exactly Ellie45

Charemon Smith

Captured Moment79

Daniel Ramey

Drenched80

Danielle Moiser

Thanksgiving Before the First33

Danielle Shulke

Sand Solitude16

Lunch in Leicester72

Spice Market84

Midnight at St. Marks85

Emily Howard

Bridal Beads62

Joe Pitkin

Office Poem10

Girls Who Disappeared21

The Parrot43

Ne Feléjcs83

Kelly Keigwin

Night Visions1

Parrot43

A Cosmic Joke75

Joanne's Cats77

Mom and Dad's Bedroom81

Kristen Weigland

Sun Through Trees18

Steering Wheel Spiderweb76

Cathedral Trees82

Louise Wynn

Light at the End48

The Last Songbird51

-TABLE OF CONTENTS-

Quartershell	76
Mary Portukalian	
The Great Story of the Chikalda Tiger	29
Minifall	41
Maple	44
The Long Way Home	50
Sun Burst	57
Matthew Trendera	
Erectile Dysfunction	7
Love Diversity	8
The Hanging	12
Michael Dunn	
Beacon Hill Streetscape	23
Nick Ferderer	
Dharma Bum Lines	17
Above the Staircase Closet	19
Three Short Stories	36
Three Day Forecast	44
Ode to the Horseless Cowboy	49
Niel Hayes	
Serenity	6
Imposing	9
Burning Tree	11
Spanning Over Ripples	71
Nikki Farland	
Blue Sari	6
Pavithra Narayanan	
A Fishy Tale	58
Richard Yates	
Fortune Cookie	63
Red Hair, Purple Sweater	69
Rosann Bartel	
Mrs. K, First Grade	78
Sara Newton	
Sips	15, 57
Inkling	28, 60
Musing	8, 32, 78
Wanderlust	68
Pages	21, 56
Will Spears	
Vietnam	72

-LETTER FROM THE EDITOR-

Welcome to the 11th edition of the Salmon Creek Journal! As we headed into the second decade of producing Washington State University Vancouver's literary review, the editorial staff and I saw this year as an opportunity, a seed year in which we could plant the future of the journal. As a result, what you hold in your hands is larger, denser, and perhaps edgier than it's been previously. We find that very exciting and hope you do, too.

This year's contributors are predominantly students, though we've also included work from a couple of instructors and a graduate student. While reviewing the submissions, the staff and I began to realize that many of the pieces had a similar sensibility, what we all termed "striving." You are about to meet an older man, "changeless as a stone," whose story might change you. There are several pieces that describe the disposable nature of our society, of relationships, of small items we don't consider closely, of things we lose along the way. And there are also quite a few pieces about animals: some very obnoxious, nasty dogs, a Kipling-esque tiger, and a fish named Minal.

Added to all of this fantastic writing are the visual art pieces that seemed created for these specific compositions. Some of them are just beautiful, but others might surprise you or appear that we approached people for specific work. That's not the case, I assure you. In a sense, this year was the type of perfect storm that literary journal staff pray for—Please, please, Gods of the Small Press, send us work that makes sense together. Apparently, they were listening.

So, find your favorite spot, be it a chair, your bedroom, or beneath a breezy tree, get comfortable, and enjoy some of the best creative efforts Washington State University Vancouver has to offer!

Best,

Amy

-STAFF BIOS-



A. K. Huseby's poetry has been published in Atlanta Review, Wilderness House, the National Undergraduate Literary Review (Albion), and Pearl. She is an English major, graduating summa cum laude in 2009, WSU-V's Auvil Undergraduate Research Fellow, and a future college educator.



Cara Cottingham loves doing everything simultaneously. She is the marketing executive for WSUV's KOUG radio, the CEO of Shameless Productions, a filmmaker, a photographer, a guerrilla journalist, a graphic designer, and an all around go-to kinda gal. Her biceps...as big as her heart.



Nikki Farland became a DTC major at WSU Vancouver out of a love of learning and a desire to participate in the extraordinary phenomenon of technology. She is unsure where her life will take her after graduation, though she intends to continue striving to make a difference in the lives of others.



Sara Newton has been at WSUV now for two years and running. She is an English and DTC Major, and involved in various activities around campus, including the Student Ambassador Program and the Salmon Creek Journal functioning as the Poetry Editor.



Will Spears is an English major in his third year. Currently he has plans to launch his own magazine after graduating and tasting different sides of the Earth.



NIGHT VISIONS, KELLY KEIGWIN

“2009 EDITOR’S CHOICE AWARD - PROSE”

~~JACKPOT~~

BYRON NALOS

There’s a blue shack with a tin roof and two open walls. The other two walls are paneled glass, and there are no other walls since it is a square building. Surrounding the shack are ancient concrete barricades corroding with the years of listless employees squatting on them. Inside the shack are a few decrepit chairs huddled around an ash tray like ghosts around a campfire. Some of the chairs have four working legs. This is where the degenerate, the weak willed, and the poor in spirit go to choke out the complications of their relentless labor with a small stick of tobacco. The workers are confined to this little shack--and the giant jet fueling trucks are confined outside of it--and this is the only designated area to smoke at Portland International Airport.

Besides the empty chairs, the concrete barricades and the ash tray, the blue shack has another permanent fixture. He’s a thin old man wearing black nylon pants and dark sunglasses. Underneath a rusty brown ball-cap is an old bald head as changeless as stone. Regardless of the time of day or the day of week, he sits there as reliable as a scarecrow.

In some other life he was probably the manager of a failing ball club with a permanent slot at the floor of their division. Most likely, it took several losing seasons to master the art of his stone indifference, and after he had chewed enough seeds in that dugout, he

decided to come smoke in this one. But he rarely talks about his days at the ball club, if they existed. And considering that it takes a rare occasion for him to mention the thirty years he spent working for Fred Meyer, I am not surprised.

All day long, testosterone charged youth cycle through the shack. The flint cracks, the smoke billows, and the youth vent away their troubles into the wind while the old man sits like a monument. And the shack billows with smoke! He must listen to more than fifty speeches a day, based on my calculations.

If you ever work here, he is the kind of man you hear about before you meet him; he is also the kind of man people love to characterize because of his predictability. He is an omnipresent, sultry man lingering in that old hut, waiting patiently for his shift--or his life--to expire. The only time you will not see him at the shack is the day after payday. This absence has caused a great number of people to take a genuine interest in the old man, and for his well being; for the working class has a benevolent gift of comedy, mockery, and lies. I am told that the day after payday is when the old man goes up north to the casinos to gamble every last dime of that fresh, crisp paycheck, and that he can't help doing so. And since I have heard it from various sources, and the story has become common even among children and witches, I believe it to be true. Despite the fact that the old man lacks a passionate interest in anything, the stamina for a gambling addiction, or even the enthusiasm to peel an orange even if he were starving--I

believe the rumors are true. Some men's sins trail behind them in a wake of catastrophic destruction and ruin, even if they don't exist.

I am one of the troubled youth who cycles through the shack. Today I walked out there to see him, perhaps only to shake him by the shoulders and check his pulse, or perhaps it was because I had something on my mind; I can't remember. I've never been a good judge of motives. Maybe it was because it looked like he was enjoying his loneliness a little too much, and I wanted to poke him with a stick.

Hello.

"Morning," he says with a voice like a stone quarry. His head is facing down, and all that is visible under the bill of his ball-cap is a square chin. He is slightly smiling. It was raining, and we talked about that.

There was a little while of silence.

"Did you hear they are going to tear this building down?" I asked him.

"Well," he said, turning his eyes up and looking around the shack. He probably knew. He was probably the first to know.

"Sounds likely," he replied, looking down again.

"They are expanding the terminal," I said, "It's just a matter of time."

But it didn't sound like my voice. It never does when I try to make small talk.

Then some more silence.

Slowly, a few more people showed up, and the conversation started to crackle like fire. I was glad because I am not a good conversationalist.

I am nervous and I am rarely prone to have a strong opinion; both complicate talking. So I leaned back on the two good legs of my chair and listened. Two of the guys were talking about some particular woman, whom we all know. They talked without fire, sentiment, or originality. I was watching the old man sitting motionless.

I leaned and asked him what he thought. A long look of consideration cracked his granite expression. In deep space, another giant comet smashed into the dusty face of Jupiter.

He began slowly, "When you hold them upside down by their ankles," he said, "all women are the same."

I thought for a moment.

"Do you mean from your perspective or theirs?" I asked.

The dust settled and the man's face resumed a semblance of stone.

"Both" he said.

The deep etches in his cheeks have a pale and dry concrete powder in them. Through the smoke and dark sunglasses the man's eyes are hardly visible. They seem almost laughing, remembering some trivial moment ages ago.

The conversation ends the same way today as always. The younger, faster smokers plow their cigarette butts into the communal ash tray first; the middle aged ones more reluctantly. But the old man stays in the shack, quietly staring at his knees. Patiently waiting for his next cigarette, or for death itself, or for God only knows what, and he pulls from his pocket a small cube and rolls the die over his fingers with his thumb.



SERENITY, NIEL HAYES



BLUE SARI, NIKKI FARLAND

-ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION-

MATTHEW TRENDA

nipples all look the same.

and you have such
weak fingers.

winnowed down to
same skin.

 same breasts.

 same sighs.

 same flesh.

different woman.

how does it feel to be one of twenty-four?

and now there's sweat all over my sheets.

thrills have become mind-numbing.

pleasure turns obnoxious.

the same as when
i'm fucking you
and you

won't.

stop.

moaning.

-LOVE DIVERSITY-

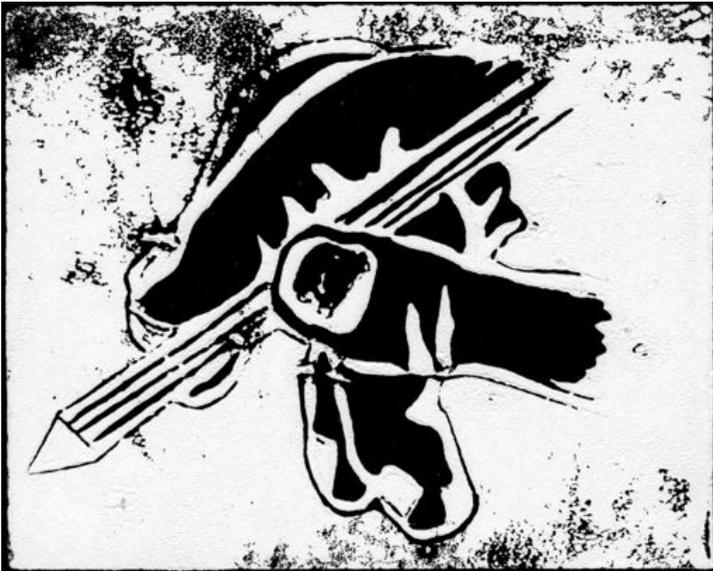
MATTHEW TRENDA

A white finger slides down the front
of my buttoned shirt and crinkles
the fabric. In a voice that's rather blunt
she declares her desire and it muffles

my own. The other, quite gone, made quick
her escape. Followed by the scent of lavender
perfume she ran ragged through thick
grass; undoubtedly fixed on finding sandier

beaches in another time. Two opposites,
but I did love them. With one gone
I'm empty; no purpose left. In a closet,
I hide from the other. Turn from her and abandon

this tortuous trap to which I'm bound.
I only kissed her, when she was around.





IMPOSING, NIEL HAYES

“2009 EDITOR’S CHOICE AWARD - POETRY”

-OFFICE POEM-

JOE PITKIN

Ages hence, will scholars say
We were a foolish people
To have abandoned the paperweight?
Living as we did under forced air
Whimpering out of the ducts, they seemed
Unwieldy, those orange ceramic horses
Brought home by first-graders everywhere,
The Magic 8-Ball aslosh with counsel,
The twenty ways of saying no,
Fist-sized chunks of limestone
Plucked from the scree, carved with
A single word, something new age, like “bliss.”
Were we wise or foolish to stack
Towers of printouts on our desks
Unanchored by so much as a snow globe
With its tiny cabin in the forest,
Its “Greetings from Scenic Idaho”?

When the winds came in dry hot gusts
And the doors and windows flew open
And every escrow officer might stand
In the whirlwind of fluttering papers,
Thinking on God’s judgment,
How much did he regret, or was he relieved?
The confidential personnel files,
The federal compliance paperwork,
How it flew off, settled in the desert
Like spilled salt, mixed up with
Inspirational emails, Internet chain letters
Printed up in terror, poorly typed erotica!

And what of that host of knick-knacks?
When all creation is churned up,
Laid in the fossil bed, will
Even one desktop Easter Island head remain
Atop its sheaf of cream-covered résumés,
Stacked in the order
Of the hiring committee’s preference?



BURNING TREE, NIEL HAYES

~~THE HANGING~~

MATTHEW TREND

Grace stood in the middle of the crowd, watching Gas men, women, and children pushed and strained against each other in order to have the perfect view. Dust flew in all directions, making it difficult to know which direction was which, and the clouded sky promised rain in the near future. Hundreds had turned out to see the man hanged. News of murder spreads quickly in a town so small, and when Mr. Gardener had come running into the house with the details, Grace dutifully followed her father down to the town square, where the hanging was supposedly taking place.

Her father reached down, grabbed her, and set her on top of his shoulders. From her perch, Grace could see the man who would be hanged. His clothes were torn and clung to his body. A full-grown, dark beard covered most of his face, but a few black teeth were visible. Long, straggling hair fell down almost to his shoulders, and it looked like he'd been tossed into more than a few puddles of mud on his way to the platform.

"Is the judge sure he's guilty, Papa?" asked Grace, tapping her father lightly on the head with one hand while clinging to his shoulder with the other.

"He's certain, Grace. The man confessed. The story was quite convincing. I was there. I heard all of it." Henry Hudgins reached up with his long arms and patted his daughter on the back. "James McGraw murdered his wife. I've no doubt in my mind."

"But he was always so friendly to me, Papa," said Grace. "He always gave me free candy at his store."

"Free candy don't make him innocent," said Henry. "He needs punishment. Mrs. McGraw was a fine woman. Her home was the cleanest in town."

Silently agreeing, Grace kept her stare on James McGraw. Despite the haggard look, she still detected friendliness in his light green eyes, though they were mostly covered by his greasy, unwashed hair. The man stood calmly, listening intently to the sentence the judge was reading aloud to the crowd. Grace noticed Felix, the gravedigger, standing nearest to the noose. He seemed eager for the hanging, and his eyes never once left the judge as the sentence was read.

Thunder sounded somewhere in the distance, and the smell of rain grew stronger in the air. People in the crowd shifted uncomfortably, wondering if they should set out for home before the rain started or stay and see the execution. A few decided their farms were more important, but most chose the latter option.

James McGraw suddenly moved his head and looked directly at Grace, who immediately blushed and turned away. She brought her gaze back slowly, meeting his light green eyes with a quiet determination. He looked afraid but content with his future. Tears fell down Grace's face and silent sobs escaped her throat at the thought of the friendly shop owner being killed.

The judge had finished reading, and he turned to face James with a glare that could have melted boulders. "We will now commence with the hanging," he said.

"He's such a young man though, Papa," Grace pleaded. "Him and Mrs. McGraw were so in love. I think we've made a terrible mistake. He's not guilty."

"Grace, he confessed. I was there. Stop this nonsense," said Henry, feeling slightly impatient at his daughter's insistence.

Grace watched helplessly as James McGraw was marched to the noose. A silent shiver ran through the crowd, though more than a few people began to taunt the accused.

"Serves you right, you madman!"

"God has judged you harshly!"

"Hell holds special places for your kind!"

With a determination no man could match, James McGraw stood tall as the executioner placed the rope over his head, though tears had formed in his eyes. The noose tightened, the executioner made his way over to a wooden lever, which when pulled would open the trapdoor, sending the charged man to his death.

As the executioner stepped away, James McGraw turned to the crowd and seemed to grow taller. In an act that no person present would ever forget, he raised his hands to the sky and screamed, "I'm no madman!" Lowering his voice, he spoke slowly, "You've judged me falsely. You good people are so sure you're right. I go to my death with a clear conscience. May God forgive you." With a violent and firm nod, he closed his eyes and waited.

After his words, Felix began to laugh nervously. It wasn't a quiet laugh, and soon it had carried over the entire crowd, causing an uncomfortable stir amongst them. Frowning at Felix and determined to be strong for the accused man, whom she felt was innocent of all guilt, Grace latched onto her father's shoulders with both hands and forced herself to watch. James McGraw stood perfectly still, arms high in the air.

Silence came over the crowd; the atmosphere grew thick with anticipation. The accused man remained motionless until, much to the confusion of the large crowd, he smiled.

With a loud creak, the trapdoor opened.

James McGraw fell.

The snap from his neck breaking echoed over the crowd. Their eager faces all turned away at the sight of the dying man, but Grace's eyes never strayed. Even as he began struggling and kicking, fighting for breath, her weeping stare stayed with him. At last he was still, and after a quick examination, the doctor pronounced him dead.

Henry Hudgins insisted upon the man's guilt for

the entire walk home, but Grace was convinced he had been falsely tried. Something about the way he had spoken removed any doubt from Grace's mind about his innocence.

Her father allowed her to visit Mrs. McGraw's grave that evening, and as she set a small flower on top of the stone, she noticed Felix throwing James McGraw's body into a crudely dug hole. As she watched the dirt being flung into the grave, Grace prayed.

"No need t'pray for tha' soul, miss," said Felix, noticing her for the first time. "Ol' James McGraw wa' as good a man as I ever seen. He'll go t'meet the Lord wi' no issues. I'm certain o' that."

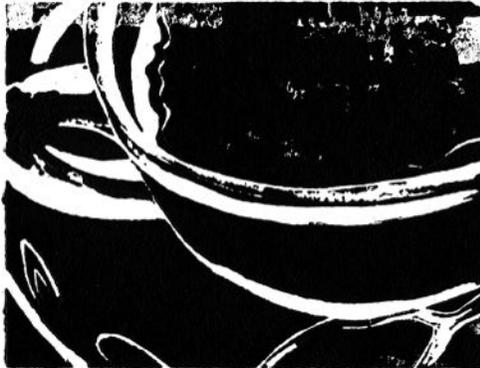
"But they say he confessed, sir," said Grace, weeping silently.

"Oh, tha' don't mean naught, miss. The man wa' framed."

Her heartbeat quickened at this assertion. Someone framed James McGraw? How could that happen? "How can be so sure, sir, the man was framed?"

"Well, tha' ain't too hard. You see, I'm the one who kilt ol' Wendy McGraw. The master here wa' framed by me."

Horrified, Grace turned to Felix and saw the look of insanity on his face. Before she could scream, Felix grabbed her. The last thing she thought of was James McGraw giving her free candy at his store. He was always such a nice man.





SAND SOLITUDE, DANIELLE SHULKE

~~-DHARMA BUM LINES-~~

NICK FERDERER

I need to parade a path to the sun,
flaming chariots
pulled by horses
 red,
 black,
brown and
white.

Like Apollo and Aphrodite
in a tree sitting,
someone to climb a mountain
 in Colorado
with me.

Write a poem on a boulder,
 black,
 gray,
or red,
 our fingers with water wet.

And the dew will know we were there.



SUN THROUGH TREES, KRISTEN WEIGAND

~~-ABOVE THE~~

~~STAIRCASE CLOSET-~~

No windows
Two shelves,
One door,

NICK FERDERER

And one wall where I tack stickers,
The slogans of a universal thesis:
Sure, I will
Free Darfur,
And yes, I support
Lesbians Against Bush,
And I would like fries with my
In-N-Out Burger, USA,

As long as the grease,
Does not cause Alexey Karamazov
And Dean Moriarty to be sick,
Or clog Ignatius Reilly's delicate valve,
Located precipitously forever on the shelf,
Like a cloud on a mountain,
Under the ceiling,
The sky,
By the ladder,
To heaven,
By the bed,
I sleep in,
Below the night light that
Makes Freire's pedagogy transparent,
Demystifies the Tao,
And lightens The History of God.
In my attic bedroom,
The dust collects books,
Books about stuff,
Stuff like encyclopedias,
About the history of encyclopedias,
And why such a book became a book,
And what is a book,
Besides a world each and of its own,

Bound,
 Numbered,
 And known,
 By Dewey Decimal and me,
 A simple page of magic,
 From clutter deciphered,
In my attic bedroom.

No rhyme never,
 Except for the Doctor himself,
 Seuss,
 Silverstein,
 And The Bard,

Nor reason neither,
 Except for Chomsky,
 Kozol,

And two bold letters by Queen bell hooks,
 So flu bugs fly well,
In the un-insulated winter air of my attic room,
 And marry fruit flies,
 Together they have flute-fly bed-bug babies,
Known as the endangered Flautist Attic Tse-Tses,
 Which sing me to sleep-sleep,
And allow me to dream,
 Without,
 A Circadian clock,
 In my attic bedroom.



-GIRLS WHO DISAPPEARED-

JOE PITKIN

Looking back, it seems strange now how almost no girls were taken, how nearly all came home from school everyday, keys dangling on shoestrings around their necks, grave princesses as if from Brothers Grimm, charged with some task so dark and sad one was drawn to love them.

But so many girls vanished other ways, no one, not even the ones who loved them, noticed. Their laugh rang different around their friends, and they did not laugh at other times. When they forgot their keys, they didn't wait out on the porch; they'd pop the windowpane.

We tried loving the best way we knew how, though in the end, we didn't know at all what that entailed, and by then they were gone anyway. We hear voices, crying for their mothers still, little girls on the phone, but hidden in brusque voices, maybe ours.



-THE FAT LADY AT EIGHT-

A. K. HUSEBY

Years before she learned she had a voice,
the fat lady was a silent child
with large watchful eyes; she occupied,
in the way water spans gaps
between stones, every spare corner.
She was the playground's leftovers.
No sound rebounded from her
in the reverb between backboard, bat
and ball, or hopscotch rocks
she was never invited to toss.
Her tights slung crotch-low, hobbled
her gait, infesting her days with the itch
and stretch of synthetic. She always forgot
to restrain her corduroy jumper while inverted,
dangling like a cherry, rotting on the vine.

Years before her nature was reframed beneath
the bleached, braided wig and more pale mockery
applied to unruly curls of so much
slick fishing line (boys never
even tried to pull or dip
in ink wells), hair that tangled like her hope
for one brief moment of genuine kindness,
the cutting desks speared her too-tight insides,
no one shushed the snickering or cracked down
on cruel sobriquets that followed her
down the halls. Before Brünnhilde's bare breasts
erupted from the chains, entrancing Siegfried and
enflaming him to give the magic ring, to shift shapes,
she, the supreme shield maiden with hips to bear
nations, threw herself on the pyre daily
because her barbarous peers were equally unaware
of this wide child's destiny to become the Valkyrie
who always gets the final word.



BEACON HILL STREETScape, MICHAEL DUNN

-LUCY-

A. DENNY

Lucy: 9:00 P.M. December 12th

The door is locked and I can't get in. Sitting in the cold, I am stuck on the other side of a barrier that is new to me. I imagine the reason he never made me a copy of the key is so that I wouldn't be able to get in during times like this. Her car is parked down the block, engine still ticking. The heater inside is probably just starting to warm up. I imagine him making coffee on the other side of the door, asking her if she likes cream or sugar, turning the stereo on with the remote that's missing a battery cover. He's letting Carter inside and telling him not to jump on his legs. She's looking at his horrible, disgusting couch pillows, wondering how long he's had them, just like I did the first time he brought me here. He's hoping she doesn't think he's too sloppy, hoping the toilet isn't stained and dirty in case she uses the bathroom in the time she is here. She sips her coffee, though it is a little too sweet for her taste and laughs at his jokes, though they do not fall into the category of what she thinks is funny. He is nervous. His hands shake as he pours a small amount of whisky into each of their cups. It's cold outside after all.

Jack: 9:10 P.M. December 12th

I am thinking about when it was warmer. Outside, the sky is thick with darkness. The breeze makes everything cold. Dry leaves rustle across the ground.

I am inside, frozen, but I feel the heater and its artificial warmth. Manmade. My jacket still holds the wind from outside, the quilted silk lining cool and slippery on my skin. The coffee cup is too hot by comparison for my hand. I set it on the table and glance at her. Sitting on the couch, hair falling from her fitted cap into her face, I realize the meaning of the color red when I look at her cheeks. I think of Christmas and how she belongs in the snow. Sipping her coffee, I wonder how she can hold the burning cup and I cannot. I feel the flask in my pocket, pressing against my thigh, liquid splashing around on the inside. I am thinking about how the fluid inside is hot and cold at the same time. I am thinking about Carter and how I haven't fed him yet today. Her mouth opens.

"Hey, how long did you say you've lived here?"

I am jolted out of my reverie.

"Oh. Well, around two years. Two years this February I think?" She glances around my house, swallowing it with her eyes. "I hope not too much longer," hopefully my answer is satisfactory. She goes on to tell me about how she wants to move. Or wants to stay, I am not really listening. She talks. I laugh, actively listening but honestly not paying any attention to her at all.

If Lucy were here, we would not be talking about housing. We would be joking about England, about how she would become a "football" player there and how she would develop a new appreciation for braces and straight teeth. We would kiss and touch, laughing. We would ignore the fact that she was leaving, we would pretend we had all the time in the world to be together, our lives carefree and full of laughter. I am thinking about Lucy. The girl keeps talking, and I nod.

Lucy: 9:25 P.M. December 12th

I am back on this street for the first time in six months and I am sitting on the freezing curb. I have decided knocking on the door while he has a woman inside would not make for the best reunion. I came to surprise--but what if my return isn't welcome?

I don't have a right to be mad. I remember the conversation. I remember how we were afraid to be forthcoming. I remember your scared eyes and shaking hands as they traced tattoos on my arm, lying on your couch.

"Well what if you meet some bloke over there?" You joked. Why were you joking?

"I won't. But if I ever did- it wouldn't matter. It really wouldn't," I was hoping you'd finish my thought.

"Well when you come back, a year will have gone by..." You waited. Your eyes expecting something I didn't know how to give.

"What are you trying to say? Are you saying you'll move on? Gee, thanks..." the mood lifted with my sarcasm. You chuckled and fell silent.

"I can't wait for you. If you meet someone over there... I will not be able to put myself through that."

"Yeah but you might meet someone too! Have you thought of that? It won't matter when I come back. No one else will matter. I don't

want time apart but it could be good for us," I felt rude even though you were smiling. You laughed. Your chest quaked, then became still. I remember that.

I wonder now--were you happy I was leaving? Did you put the sad face on to guilt me? You have a woman in your house. I am sitting on the freezing curb.

Jack: 9:45 P.M. December 12th

The girl is sitting. Her face is stone cold, she is angry or bored, I can't really tell. Lucy has brought me to a different place, though she is not here, and I don't really care how this girl feels. I say nothing. I stare at my stereo, pick another song, another mood. Maybe something that will subtly tell her she is not welcome and to leave.

"I'll be right back," she looks up at me with mean eyes and I walk briskly to the bathroom. Looking in the mirror, in fluorescent light, I look as if I have just thawed out. When I return to the living room, she is gone. I walk to my front door to check if she really has left, when I see her car is not on the street anymore. Though the girl has left, I see someone new. Alone, sitting on my empty dark street, there is a person on the curb. Wrapped up in a black coat, sitting rigidly, hugging themselves but looking up, staring towards where her car was just two minutes ago. Though I cannot see them, this person is familiar. Though I cannot place where I know them from, I know them. Carter runs outside, past my legs and starts barking. I yell his name and he turns around and barks at me. The person turns around.

The girl is facing me, and I can see her clearly and everything is so not obscured in this dark night that I immediately feel I am in a dream. I have not seen this face in six months but I have been thinking about it more than any other thing. I know this face so well, it has not changed and it is smiling and I start laughing harder than I have in so long. My breath comes out in striking white clouds, my laughter echoes through the street and I hear my own voice more clearly than I have in six months.

"Hey," Lucy says, and she is timid but happy. I feel the same way.



-THE GREAT TALE OF THE CHIKALDA TIGER -

MARY PORTUKALIAN

"Grandpa's going to tell a Tiger Story tonight!"
"Which one?," we ask, although we already know. There are four Tiger Stories, but only one we have ears for—The Tale of the Chikalda Tiger, the tiger, Grandpa says, that made his heart go, Futa...futa...futa.

We gather around the campfire. Sometimes two or three small children crowded into one faded, worn camp chair, paying little heed to the smoke that burned our eyes. We waited for this moment all day.

Grandpa loves this time. For sixty minutes he is the lone speaker—every one of his grandchildren is silent. So he takes his time, he has no problem telling us to quiet down. He waits for complete attention.

He tells of a time when he and Grandma were young parents living in the high mountains of Southern India. Once, from down in the scorching valley came reports of a tiger harassing the provincial villages. The tiger had been killing the villages' water buffalo and had even killed a man. Grandma, Grandpa, and his father ("your Great-Grandpa Elmer," we're reminded) all left to find this tiger.

Following the directions of the villagers, Grandpa took three buffalo calves and chained each to a tree some miles from one another. In this way he planned to discover where the tiger prowled at night. The next morning, he and Grandma took the Jeep to check on the three calves. The first one they heard before they saw. Still alive. They checked the second calf, and it, too, was still alive and whole. But when they came to the third calf—only the leg that chained the calf to the tree remained.

Around the campfire, girls whisper their sadness for the baby cow. Their brothers, meanwhile, look at

each other, say "cool!," and lean forward, as Grandpa silences us with a look and continues.

Now he was sure of where to make his camp that night. He bound another buffalo calf to the tree. He then secured a wooden machan platform high in the branches above. Grandpa now remarks on night's approach in the jungle. He wore many layers because, although the evening was warm, the nights of the jungle are cold. As the sun fell lower, the noises of the jungle grew loud—the meow of the peacocks as they flew up to roost, the constant hum of insects that settled on Grandpa's arms, the rustle of the thorny Lantana as creatures beneath him began to move. Above, a flying squirrel's silhouette soared across the darkening sky.

Night came to the jungle.

The hours crept by:

Ten...

Eleven...

Twelve...

Near one, Grandpa heard a far (but not far enough) "Rrrrough...Grrroughhh..." (Grandpa shakes his head, eyes bulging, cheeks bellowing—and makes a great growl—we giggle anxiously, leaning forward in anticipation).

Grandpa's heart pounded in his chest. The tiger sounded again. This time nearer. Soon the tiger would appear. Grandpa's heart hammered. It made a noise like, Futa...Futa...Futa...

Now he could hear the tiger moving through the Lantana brush under him. The calf strained against the chain, crying—it would not escape. The tiger came into view. A monstrous Bengal tiger. At least ten feet in length, its yellow eyes glowed as it cautiously encircled the calf. Up in the tree, Grandpa's shaking hands readied his rifle. His heart beat in his ears so loudly he marveled that the tiger didn't hear it.

Futa, Futa, Futa, Futa!

He steadied his hand and took aim. The tiger was closer than ever now, it was tall enough to jump and pull Grandpa down. He pulled the trigger and... click

(Grandpa smacked his forehead) He'd forgotten to take the safety off! His heart beat so fast! Futafutafutafuta! He took aim once more and squeezed the trigger. KABOOOOM!

He had hit the tiger—but it still lived! Faster than a cobra, the tiger retreated into the thick Lantana underbrush. There was nothing Grandpa could do but wait for morning.

Like the tiger's long tail, the night stretched on.

Two...

Three...

Four...

Around five, the sounds of morning mingled with the mechanic rumble of the Jeep that carried his father to help him. Grandpa anxiously watched for the Jeep, but as it came up the dirt path, he saw that not only his father had come, but he brought Grandma and their four young boys!

"Laura!" Grandpa yelled, "Wounded tiger! Keep the boys in the Jeep!"

We all glance at our fathers...do they remember this? Grandpa and his father both looked to the Lantana now. Lantana, Grandpa says, is very, very thick, with thorns this long—like blackberries, only worse. The bruised Lantana revealed the hiding place of the tiger. But the path was low and narrow; Grandpa crawled on his belly through the thick brush to face the injured animal. Grandpa's stomach scraped against the dry, red soil. With his rifle in hand, he followed the bloody trail left by the tiger while listening for the heavy, labored breathing and deep growl of the wounded animal. Soon he saw the brown orange of the tiger's body, sides heaving with each breath. But the head of the Tiger was hidden to him. All he could see was the long body with no clue of where to aim. If his aim was not sure, the tiger would turn and Laura might have become a widow that day. So Grandpa waited. His heart beat so hard!

Futa! Futa! Futa!

The tiger shifted its weight, Grandpa carefully aimed and pulled the trigger.

BOOOM!

He killed the tiger!

Around the campfire, a collective deep breath as the story ends. Chaos explodes as each child has a question for Grandpa. But now is not the time for questions, our mothers say, now it's time for bed. As we snuggle into our sleeping bags, we talk about how brave our Grandpa is and make our plans to visit the jungles of India. But tonight, we are content with the dreams that will take us there.



THANKSGIVING BEFORE THE FIRST - DANIELLE MOISER

It's 1983, and nothing has gotten simpler.
Elaine opens the door to the spare room:
belly-first, she enters, practicing for a body
that will soon swell.
Everyone will be arriving in a matter of hours,
with still so much to do.

David's collared shirt lays crumpled,
like a bad idea
having met its waste-basket demise.
She fills the iron with water and plugs it in.

Baby is exploring the stability
of the ironing board,
measuring the distance
between the edge of the board
and the window with paws and whiskers,
teetering with precision and middle age,
she measures the distance in miles.

Elaine wraps her right hand in masking tape.
stick - thkkk. stick - thkkk.
Baby makes a courageous leap to the floor
as the carpet of brown-black-mottled fur
is lifted away from the top of the ironing board.
stick - thkkk.

The iron slowly ticks on.
Elaine hovers her hand an inch from the metal
surface, waiting for the pulse of radiating heat.

She waves David's crumpled shirt in the air,
letting it unfold and billow
out like a forgotten flag,
or a clean sheet snapped and smoothed
over a familiar bed,
before she smooths it
over the top of her newly clean board.

The window slowly fogs between the heat
of the iron and chill of November air,
and Elaine peers out,
watching as David's car pulls into the driveway,
a rattled tin can, dented and painted blue.

Elaine smiles a little to herself in anticipation
and rubs her belly,
the bump she senses, but nobody sees.
"Kick," She urges, "Please kick."
She smooths over her sweater and begins to iron,
picking at clumps of lint and cotton,
smiling at how such tiny things can be so
significant,
or so unseen,
gently smoothing out all the wrinkles
and imperfections,
the shirt becomes her whole life.

She wonders how many people will touch her belly,
pressing them both into the fold
of familial embrace;
Half a dozen aunts and uncles,
Elaine and David's parents:
grandparents in waiting,
unaware, eager cousins and their children:
all will storm the front door,
linger at the first floor.

No-one will venture up
to this little outpost upstairs,
her tiny alcove of private thoughts,
her inner life hidden
in the innermost part of her home,
no-one will receive any notion of this room,
her mind,
her quiet mouth will not betray her.

Elaine unplugs the iron
as David walks into the room.
Without a word he kisses her,
then slides his arms
into freshly pressed sleeves.

"They're almost here," he says.
She presses his hand against her belly,
"Almost," she says.



STAIRCASE, KRISTEN WEIGAND

-THREE SHORT STORIES -

NICK FERDERER

The moon was up and the pavement was wet and I was with the same girl I was with when I went the time before and we entered, me and Carolyne. It was the coffee shop where earlier in the month a story developed for me about a homeless man I met earlier in the month. I wanted the same inspiration I had experienced during that month of October, but the scruffy vagrant I named Harrison was not there, and I sat in a different spot, at a counter table, not a worn, brown, leather couch. Carolyne had a book bag of homework, three chapters of economics and two math problems, three pages each, and a short paper to write but the topic and structure were secure and planned ahead of time. She was across from me. I had nothing to do besides not distracting her more than I already had, which is why she had so many books in her red plaid book bag and doing that was everything. Little black earplug headphones swirled and shook in my ears, "The White Stripes" and "William Fitzsimmons" and "Jackie Greene" and "Spoon" and "The Shins," like blue jazz. The counter table doubled as a chessboard for yuppies like me, so I befriended time and decided to write a short story about chess and war, old and young people, structure and free spirits for a class I was taking about short stories. I called it "Pigeons, War, and Hippie Music," and it fit the mood and I wrote it.

An 8-oz triple shot decaf espresso steamed steamy steam to soothe my nerves on the last day of classes the week before Thanksgiving break during my first sophomore year in college, a Thursday.

"Pigeons, War, and Hippie Music"

"Shoo. I'm black," said the man with a cigarette lodged deep in his gray beard, orange tinges around his purple lips.

"Guess I'm white then," replied the other old

man, feigning a smile that added wrinkles to his weathered face.

"You go first."

They spoke with exaggerated gruff tones to each other, the effects of years of smoking. Don, the black player, began stealing cigarettes from his dad at age 13. Vaughn, the white player, was influenced by his older brother and began at an even earlier age. They both smoked Marlboros.

Like ignorant defeated gray pawns cast to the side, the Central Park pigeons silently observed the daily chess game between the two Vietnam veterans. The stone table they sat at had poop droppings where a rook or a knight should go. Don blamed the nearest pigeon and kicked at its shadow. Neither man cared for pigeons much.

Vaughn beat a fresh red pack of smokes against his palm, tossed the cellophane to the pigeons, lit the cigarette dangling from his lip, and moved an off-white pawn, all in silence. Don flicked his butt at the nearest pigeon and began his routine yellow-eyed stare at the board, as if to move a pawn with sheer will power. War had begun.

"How's Martha?" roused Vaughn.

"Still dead."

"Bring her flowers on her birthday?" He smirked.

"Two months ago." Don moved the chipped pawn he'd been staring at and blew a cloud of smoke at Vaughn. "Your turn."

"That's nice of you." Vaughn slid his bishop from behind his ivory line. "Go."

The triple black espresso to the left of the white Mac was flat and cold and bitter and only a few sips were sipped as it sat on the checkerboard table. The story was stuck. The characters did not develop right, but I wrote notes that explained everything on a purple advertisement about a live blues band in town next Tuesday. I found it outside the coffee shop, inside a rusted trashcan, and I wrote every detail about every mannerism of the two old men and their sins—Vaughn blinked his left grey-blue eye slower

than his right grey-blue eye (symbolic as if to say he had no creativity, the right side of the brain is the creative side and it controls the left side of the body and they were grey blue because he was old and over half-dead); Don patted his feet and clapped his hands to his knees when he was nervous which was often and he could not live worry free in his own wrinkled skin because he had killed people in Nam.

"The Brothers Karamazov" lay on top of the purple advertisement dotted with notes about "Pigeons, War, and Hippie Music." An American Mutual Funds business card that I used as a bookmark separated the last sixty-three pages from the first six hundred and thirty nine. The three brothers K, Alexey, Ivan, and Dmitri, were not yet fully signs and symbols for humanity, originally only meant to be gods in 1860 something when they were brought to life by Fyodor, but now they were in heaven forever, on tons of pages in twenty translations, like Don and Vaughn were supposed to be and the young hippie guitar player I would have named Ray or Miller was supposed to be too. The curious word hippie had not yet been typed to life; my clammy fingers and mind had not yet typed him up yet, not even his hairy toes with toe jam under the nails.

On the purple advertisement I scratched themes that lingered like dust in a coffee shop or like tired eyelids hanging over tired irises like mine, and Carlyne's too. The themes sounded like wisdom in old age, or the brevity in their dialogue; the loss of innocence and rosy outlooks in life lost upon return from epic journeys like war; competition and strategy as normal like war; details in life, the pigeons, get glossed and lost and degraded; and the young "lazy" generation killed the "American Dream" at two o'clock in the morning of the next day with a white keyboard. I typed a new story I never titled.

Her eyes hated me. The wrinkle between her brows told me so.

She pushed her hair to the side. The wrinkle

intensified. She pushed her hair again, then put it in a ponytail—a sexy change, but, nonetheless, done in spite.

She yawned, easing the tension for a second, only for it to return with newfound vigor. On one side of the round table too large to be called a bed stand, but too small to be called a coffee table she sat, her eyes like two moons beating in the night. A tall stool restricted my head from falling, keeping it upright, and off of the table, but in the line of fire.

Themes on the purple advertisement for this one were break-up, life continues but love remains. Intrapersonal garblygook clogged the plot good, or bad-like and it was vague, cliché. I second-guessed whether or not Carolyn was truly fuming at me since the story was about her, or if she was just tired and me too.

The beginning was the most blasted of the three and the third, another title to a short story, I thought would write right, or at least better, but the synapses between the black earplugs fired faster and impromptu like. The coffee was decaf and it was bitter and it was colder now.

"Rush"

Darren lived by the rule that says the only thing better than the sip before, is the smoke after. He had already had a few sips.

"Ahhmmm!"

Time for a smoke.

If Ali could dance like a butterfly and sting like a bee in the ring, then Darren was his counterpart in the sack. His new strategy, dubbed the "reverse train driver" had gotten the blonde to round two. As he puffed, his eyes glossed and his chest grew larger; he was 4-0 this week with the ladies. The first exhale erased his look of reverie.

"Wow. That was. Really. Really. Good" the blonde gasped.

He poetically muttered, "Ya," but he said it to her eyes. That was all she needed.

"My number. Is. 360-609-9875." It was a clear plead for more.

"Let's just enjoy this moment." Again, empathetically. Darrin thought to himself and she, lying on her back, thought about him.

Three weak stories with weak characters and weak themes and three shots of decaf espresso, still cold, but I agree with Darren that first and second break-ups with the same woman are better when the sex is good and the sex is frequent and wild, free; when it is warm and wet. But I never got to explain that theme and then Carolyne turned a page, her wrinkle wrinkled and suddenly I wanted a smoke, a Marlboro if I could bum one from a bum outside. The paper cup with the decaf inside had begun to grow a brown ring around the bottom like a circle around a tired eye. I tossed it and the purple advertisement with themes and notes about the three rote stories in the same rusty trashcan as I exited the chipped paint door to outside. Plenty of Harrison-like fellas were puffing in the night, adding to the clouds that the moon glowed through.

"Anyone got a smoke I could bum?" I asked the soggy pavement. A dirty, scruffy, oily-haired older man with a dirty, scruffy, oily beard stood, slouched beneath the weight of his army jacket, holy jeans, and worn sneakers with brown laces offered up his pack without a word, in silence. I took the lucky one and turned another one upside down. "Light?" His orange lighter lit an orange flame that sparked an orange-tipped cigarette, a Basic Light, no Marb red but the first smoke in seven months buzzes all the same, and even more so in the silence of a moon clouded out. The bum flicked his butt to the curb with the other butts and walked into the coffee shop.

I cased the shop, found another smoke, a Camel Wide, from another scruffy man with a brown jacket and created my own cloud that clouded the lamppost constellations on 23rd street before I went back inside to the chess table where I found Carolyne still reading and the army bum studying yesterday's paper.

I sat down and closed the computer screen only

to join the army man in a slouch to study, but I had nothing to study beyond the words infused by black earplug headphones through my ears and Jackie Greene told me it was time to be "Gone Wanderin'" again. Afraid my lungs still had traces of smoke, I muttered, "Ready?" Carolyn agreed, and holding each other's cold hands, we left through the chipped paint door onto the wet pavement under the Friday early morning clouded sky.



MINIFALL, MARY PORTUKALIAN

-AT MOULTIN FALLS -

BYRON NALOS

On a rock above a black river,
last week's snow is remembered in patches
that make my hands cold climbing the notches,
my butt gets wet at the top-
sitting over the churl-froth
watching the water fall. Tying my shoes.

Would i survive
if i fell in, Winter River?

A human is like a kitten in a washing machine.

I imagine my eyes would bud and bulge
with contortions of fear,
my funny carcass deflecting off the rocks-
my limbs making wet-cat seizure water slaps.
Yelping, grunting, growling
jerking, bleeding, drowning in the same river
we play in during summertime.

A human is a little blossom
on the five lane interstate.
Sometimes I wonder how I made it
this far.

Well, Black River
I don't suppose you care,
you'd drown any unlucky, clumsy sap,
you're as crooked as you are beautiful.
So if your grinning white caps
swallow me early
in the coming and going

I won't feel short-changed.

-THE PARROT -

JOE PITKIN

The parrot regards the open door
Of his cage as a human might:
As a possibility just beyond
His powers to imagine.
He works a thick reptilian tongue
About the swung hinge, hangs upside-down
Like a creature of incomprehensible
Dignity, recites the favorites
Of his careworn phrases like a credo,
As though through words
He might recover his ancient home.



PARROT, KELLY KEIGWIN

-THREE DAY FORECAST-

NICK FERDERER

Stars stay still in the night
sky. Archers fight lions,
fish swim up and down free
streams to new distant
galaxies illuminated under half
moon light. Potential dot-to-dot
love is lost as city lights imitate.
By 3 o'clock life begins and
by 6 o'clock supernova is gone.
The sun's slow cycle passes
from East to West
and the weatherman predicts cloudy
skies tomorrow night.



MAPLE, MARY PORTUKALIAN



EXACTLY ELLIE, CARA COTTINGHAM

-BOSTON TERRIERS -

BYRON NALOS

Naturally, you are suspicious of the new neighbor, and the peculiar schedule that I keep, and you yowl and wail to your master during the odd hours that we meet each other. And this fence with a lattice neck does little to separate us, when you both climb on that bench, and I sit on this porch, and when our eyes meet, you yowl (that is the only word for the sound).

The fence has numerous holes, and it is not soundproof, and I imagine a light wind could knock it down, and then what?

This pleasant neighborhood has never seen such a crisis. They would need "fence repairmen," and lawyers and legislators, I believe.

Either way, I wish it would blow over. Then I would have a shot at the Boston Terriers. I would strangle them together with their own leash. They interrupt everything holy about my morning caffeine Eucharist.

You know what I hate about those dogs? Well, I'll tell you anyway. They're a Mob. They do terrible things together, they depend on each other to be evil, and they only bark at me when they are together, the Mob. (There's your damn thesis Ezra). But if I can isolate one, lure him to the corner, then I can piss on him and blow smoke in his angry little face through the holes in the fence. He'll only whimper a bit.

On the other hand, when the brothers are together I have to sneak out to the porch quietly, so they don't notice me, or else, and that's what I hate about those dogs.

I'm not exactly sure why I think of them as male. I guess I would feel horrible peeing on a woman, no matter what species. Does that mean I'm sexist?

I feel bad enough about smoking. My mom gave me this brochure about quitting, which I use as a bookmark, just as an accident.

Step Two: Get Support From Your Friends

The sons of bitches next door certainly don't give me any support, they just taunt me through the fence. Don't they know that I am a musician, and that I hate unnecessary noise? And can't they see that this coffee will only stay warm for so long; I would like to enjoy it?

Step Seven: Find Other Ways to Relax

I hate being provoked.

What am I even saying?! I don't want to quit smoking, I never had the intention. It's just a bookmark strategically placed by a loving mother. I don't mind being a smoker, or a sexist.

My girlfriend does.

Who was Oedipus anyway?

I like smokers, you know why? I will tell you anyway. Their problems are out in the open, which gives them a one up on you, unless you like hiding your problems. And nobody likes a smoker, they make brochures for them. So you don't have to worry about having too many friends, the cheap kind. And at least I'm not a vegan. People hate smokers for bad reasons; they hate vegans for good ones. Livestrong, and far away from me.

Registered republican, I blame most of the world problems on the Boston Terrorists, it's that simple. If they were people they'd be a couple of meatheads, probably pro-wrestling brothers. I like to think of them as people often; it makes them easier to dislike. Deep down it's hard to dislike a dog, even a yowler.

But there they are, sitting across that fence waiting for a chance to thrash me. Them on that bench, and me sitting on the porch, and the porch is elevated enough that we can see eye to eye. It's totally ridiculous. But I guess I don't entirely hate them. At least they're meatheads, or smokers, or mobsters-- not vegans.

One day I would like to set them free from the yard and their leashes for a long, long run, like a poem.



LIGHT AT THE END, LOUISE WYNN

-ODE TO THE HORSELESS COWBOY-

NICK FERDERER

You hero of the littered untamed land
Without a crown.
You horseless cowboy.

You worthless piece of art
No creature will look at,
Selfless beauty of hopeless sun-fire paints
Painted on a useless sun-bleached canvas.
You ideal snapshot impression.

You aimless walker in broken broke-in brown boots
With no spurs,
Towards a less broken mellow sunset,
An eternal mirage in far west
On a dusty desert trail,
To the beat of your hard heart pounding hard.
You silent lyrical snare.

You outcast amongst outcast animals
With downcast dewdrop blue eyes,
Shadowed by mangy sweet-smelling sweaty black hair,
Without a floppy hat
To hide a brown tanned neck
Craning low to be one with
Ivory feet concealed by those suffocating boots.
You stone pillar still in the quarry.

You cloudy-eyed dreamer in the day,
Dreamer in the night,
In a blue, blue, sky blue day,
Searching for the shadowed corners of the desert
To shine brightest and be alone,
But always exposed in the circular world
By pounding rays of barren servitude.
You seed of a yellow sunflower.

One erupting tear
Cuts through your dirty right cheek,
Like a river through a canyon,
While sitting hunched by your campfire
With dust and snakes
And your tumble weeds to witness,
As smoke columns swirl
Your simple dreams
Into the starless empty night,
About a younger cowboy,
With an influential lasso,
And a devoted lass.
But you only have ivory feet.



THE LONG WAY HOME, MARY PORTUKALIAN
-50-

-THE LAST SONGBIRD -

LOUISE WYNN

No one expected that a starling would be the last bird left in North America. It took awhile for the European starling to become established, but they were hardy little creatures, and in 1890 they finally succeeded. Then of course they spread all across the country. Lots of birders hate them, along with the English sparrow, for taking away habitat from native species, but I think that's a short-sighted way to look at it.

Yet I certainly didn't expect to be providing refuge for the last starling in central Washington. I'd raised Mozart from a hatchling. Cheesy name, I know, but my excuse was my age: I was only 12 years old when he hatched. And I was the kind of kid who read Wikipedia entries to while away the after-school hours waiting for my parents to get home from work. That's where I'd read about Mozart's pet starling, whose singing the composer had enjoyed so much. Mozart had even written a poem which he read at a funeral and for the bird when it died.

So I named my starling Mozart. I'd found him under a tree in the woods next to our old farmhouse, no sign of parent birds anywhere around. I hoped that he hadn't already been infected with West Nile virus. I kept him in a cage in our library on the second floor. He could see birds outside--there were a few left for him to see at that time--and I recorded some of their calls and songs for him while I could, so he could grow up with the sights and sounds of his own species.

Like others of his kind, he was a good mimic. I never tried to teach him to say my name, or any other human words, but he made lots of other sounds. My favorite was the squeaky sound the garage door made when it opened and closed. He made that sound so well that Smut (Smut the Mutt, our charcoal-colored mixed-breed dog from the pound) used to run to the door,

thinking Mom or Dad had come home. (Eventually Smut stopped running to the door, even when it was really them driving into the garage, until he heard them calling his name.)

But I played music for Mozart. At first I kept the 6-CD player rotating through a mix of Mozart, Bach, and Beethoven throughout the day. But after reading a book about training pet parrots to speak, I thought that might be too much for him, so I made a few CDs just for Mozart, ripping some favorites of mine from the classical-mix disks I liked. I preferred Bach, and I like to think little Mozart did, too, in spite of his namesake. He could sing the melody of "Sheep May Safely Graze" from start to finish. He enjoyed the Brandenburg concertos, too, and he whistled little bits of them to me whenever I came into the library. I liked how he added his own variations and flourishes.

I spent most of my afternoons with Mozart. I would let him out of the cage so he could fly around the room. Between flights, he perched on the curtain rods, the tops of lamps, and the back of the chair where I sat in front of the computer, reading about music, science, and history.

Besides the bird and my parents, I had little company. I was a lonely nerd of a boy, the only one of the 23 kids on the school bus whose parents hadn't lived here all their lives.

I sat alone on the old yellow bus. I was happy to be left alone: it was so much better than when we'd first moved to the country, when I was 11 and just starting middle school, when the kids' attention was pure torture.

Yes, being left alone was fine with me. But bullies like James Stevens have an instinct for when their victims have had enough peace and quiet. So I was dismayed, but not surprised, when my two months of pleasant solitude in the back of the bus were ended:

"Hey, Dan the Man is looking at a book!"

James pulled it away from me and held it up so Logan could read the title. Logan was the leader of James's posse, a couple of inches shorter and 15

pounds lighter than James, but just as mean.

"Why Birds Sing." James and Logan howled with laughter and slapped each other on the back. Most of the other kids on the bus glanced over and laughed. It was required, if you didn't want to be the butt of the next James and Logan comedy bullying act, to laugh or at least smile at the gag lines.

"I'll show you why birds sing," James shouted. He opened the book and held it by the front cover, giving the back cover to Logan. They pulled the book apart. It looked like they'd had plenty of experience doing it.

I couldn't help myself: I let a little moan escape.

"Yep, that's why!" Logan shouted. "Because somebody's rattling their cage!"

I looked up at the huge rear-view mirror that allowed the bus driver to see what was happening to his passengers---but I knew it wouldn't do any good, because Mr. Albergo was if possible more scared of James and Logan than his young passengers were. He'd been known to look back only twice: Once was when Stacey Vincent had screamed after the bullies set the end of her long pony tail on fire. Mr. Albergo had stopped the bus and gotten the girl off, grabbed some snow to put out the smoldering hair. The stench was terrible.

The other time he looked back was when James and Logan had gotten into a fight with each other. He stopped the bus that time, too, opened the emergency back door, and helped all the rest of us get off the bus. He smiled grimly when we were all on the ground. "The boys can fight it out," was all he said when one of the girls started to ask a question.

Mr. Albergo almost lost his job over that one, because the girl with the question wanted to use her cell phone to call her mom. She was James's little sister--and their dad was the Assistant Superintendent for Facilities.

But two of the kids today hadn't laughed, so Logan turned his attention to them.

"Hey Haley Bailey, Come-along Cayley"--oh, he was

quite the wit, if only in his own mind--"Why the sour face? You wanna sing, too, like the birds, like Dan the Man here?"

Haley's mom was the county librarian, the only person that James Stevens and Logan Robbins feared, probably because she was the only person their fathers respected. And that was because when they'd tried to remove both copies of "The Catcher in the Rye" from the county library, she had enlisted the full force of the PTA, National Library Association, and our Congressman against them. The four high school English teachers had added it to their summer reading list for rising seniors, and an article in the paper said the only bookstore in the county reported 15 orders for the book that month, after the one paperback copy that had been gathering dust for the past 40 years or so was bought.

"That's a library book," Haley said. "It's not funny to do that. It cost a lot of money, and the county can't keep buying a new book every time someone rips one apart."

I noticed two things at once: She was defending the book, not me; and she was acting like this book-ripping incident wasn't the first one. But I should mention too that I had a bit of a crush on her, and I was beginning to think at that moment that she liked me. Of course she was too smart to actually come out and defend me, leaving herself open to future attacks from the bullies.

As if he hadn't heard, Logan turned to the other bus-rider who hadn't smiled, Haley's little brother Rory.

"What's wrong, ya little snot-eater, you got no sense of humor, like your ugly big sister?"

Rory had once, when he was in first grade, been caught picking his nose and eating the boogers, but if James and Logan had their way, he would carry that nickname to his grave.

And people wondered why the county's population kept decreasing. The only families left after my generation grew up would be the Stevens and Robbins

clans, and they would be downsized, too, because even their own siblings detested the bullies, who at times treated them worse than the rest of us.

Rory was a smart little kid. I'd once heard him sass Mrs. Lincoln, the third-grade teacher, by saying, "Is that a rhetorical question, or do you really want me to answer it?" He'd gone unpunished, too. In fact, Mrs. Lincoln bragged to the other teachers and to Rory and Haley's mom about what a smart little whip she had in her class that year. So Rory was smart enough not to respond to this particular rhetorical question.

Mr. Albergo opened the front door without saying anything. James and Logan made a big show of picking up the spine and seven or eight sections of the book and handing them to me.

I turned to Rory and Haley and said, "Aren't you guys getting off here today? Your mom told my mom she'll come pick you up later." Rory and Haley nodded, got their backpacks, and climbed down after me. James and Logan made faces and sing-songed, "Your mom, oh, your mom told my mom..."

I yelled at the bus door as it was closing, "You morons! You're so dumb you can't even come up with an original insult!"

Haley pulled at my arm to try to drag me away. Mr. Albergo started to drive off, but one of the bullies came up behind him and grabbed his right arm away from the steering wheel. Mr. Albergo slammed on the brakes, and Logan and James opened the door and came after us.

We ran toward my house as fast as we could. We had enough of a head start so we could get to the front door, open it and slam it closed before James and Logan got to it. They pounded on it a few times, but then grew silent, and I realized they'd seen the note. My parents left a note taped to the front door every single day. I usually took it into the house with me, but I hadn't even noticed it today. I guessed they were reading it. Probably slow readers, so we would have time to get to the phone and dial 9-1-1.

I motioned Haley and Rory toward the stairs and made a phone-to-ear gesture with my hand. Haley nodded. It was still silent outside the front door. I put my eye up to the peephole. Nobody was on the front porch.

Then I heard the garage door open. Smut, who had followed Haley and Rory up the stairs, also heard it, and ran back downstairs, barking. He seemed to know it wasn't Mom or Dad, must have felt the fear we were feeling, because it wasn't his happy excited bark, more like a scared whining snarl.

I remembered the baseball bat we kept behind the fridge, next to the door that opened from the kitchen to the garage. (Family joke: in case a burglar ever got in the garage because he wanted to steal some leftovers.) I grabbed it in one hand and Smut's collar in the other and waited by the door. Nothing happened, except the sound of glass breaking above.

Haley screamed. "Stay!" I commanded Smut. I ran upstairs and was almost hit in the head as a second rock came through the big window in the library. Mozart was flapping around crazily inside his cage, making squawking sounds I hadn't heard from him before.

Rory opened the cage just as I said, "No! He's safer in there!" But it was too late. Mozart flew out of the cage, once around the room, and out the window. The last time I saw him he was flying toward the woods.





SUN BURST, MARY PORTUKALIAN



-A FISHY TALE-

PAVITHRA NARAYANAN

I have a fish called Minal. "Minal" (in Tamil) means lightning. Minal is a beta - a Siamese fighter fish. A beta has to be kept alone in a bowl because it will fight unto death any fish it sees. I don't know how it mates. So, Minal lives alone in a big glass jar. Minal has no mate and has not mated. I don't know if he is lonely. I think he is. Often times I refer to him as her, which might lead to an identity crisis. Minal is suicidal, not because of the identity thing, but because many fish are. I think it's because they are used to jumping high in the water and landing back in water. (I have salmon and dolphins in mind). But in a contained environment like a bowl or jar, the chances of a fish landing outside of the bowl are high. They take that chance and usually land outside. If lucky, someone will put them back into the bowl before those allotted minutes are up. A friend said that he kept his fish near the sink and would fill the sink with water, so if the fish jumped it would land in the sink. I do not know why he just didn't put a lid on the bowl. Anyway, his fish jumped, but not into the sink. And died. To get back to Minal, his jar has a lid with holes. This is really Minal the Second.

A friend gave me both Minals. For the record, I do not like to domesticate any living being. But my friend thought I needed a companion and he got me a fish. I think he also got me a fish because it had to be something that would survive my isolated existence. He also thought my social skills needed improvement. That's a whole lot of thought - my friend is a very thoughtful person.

He is concerned about me. People do not know what to make of a single woman with no cat, dog, or child. That combination also ensures that people conversations are part of an un-happening scenario! So, he thought, a fish would help. I did not want a fish. I really did not want any pet. I think pet stores should be banned. But my friend wouldn't take the fish back. I considered dropping it into a stream, but I learned that it was not possible because a beta's natural habitat is the rice fields of Thailand. Why the hell is a beta sitting on shelves in the U.S.??? I guess it got caught in that capitalist plan! Anyway, that's how "Minal the First" came to live with me. But it was for a very short while and he just died one morning. I was convinced he just gave up on having to live a bottled existence and I flushed him down the toilet bowl. My friend was sad when I told him Minal died. At first he thought I had flushed away a live Minal, but after being convinced that the mean side of me would not be directed toward a fish, he was angry with PetSmart and he went back to the store. And, guess what? It is the shop's policy to "replace" a pet that dies within the guarantee period!! They said that the next time it happened, not to flush it down, but to put in a plastic bag, freeze it, and bring it to the store as evidence that it died. And to also bring the bill! Welcome consumer - the exchange policy gifts you Minal the Second!

Minal has now been with me for over a year. We are quite fond of each other. He knows his name and comes swimming to where I am when I call out to him. My friend says that it's because of probability, not because Minal is responding to me. He says, regardless of my vocal chords at work, considering the circumference of the jar, Minal has to swim to the side I am, while doing his rounds. I disagree. Minal likes me to talk to

him. Also, if I ignore Minal for too long, he taps on the glass.

Almost every aspect of our lives, responses, and thoughts, is pre-structured. In this indoctrinated mind, there is really no place for this fishy tale. And most people would think it's weird to talk about a fish.

Well, this fishy encounter has improved my people skills. I talk to friends, family, students, and strangers about Minal. I am excited when I see a beta on someone's table and always ask what it's named. I've yet to meet someone who has named his/her beta, so to every beta I see, I say: "Hello Minal!"

If people don't quite know where to place a single woman with no cat, dog, or child, they know even less what do with one who has a fish.

P.S.

This was written in 2003. Minal has been dead for a while now. I still believe that living beings should not be domesticated.



-BATH-

BYRON NALOS

That ghost
in the foggy mirror
becomes crisp with every swipe
the dry towel squeaks,

I drag the razor
through my foamed face,
again the towel, again
the razor.

The tap water is fire
with white smoke,
outside the steamy window
there is snow.

In momentary glances
we are face to face
between squeaks-
when I ask that ghost
if he is trustworthy,

if he could take care of Her,
and Our Family,
and I hold the razor
to his throat.

~~BRIDAL BEADS~~

EMILY HOWARD

On my hands and knees
surrounded by satin, silk, and lace
in all shades of white
with sequins and beads
covering trains, corsets, and veils.

These beads are not secure
in their placements
of controlled randomness
or in designs of flowers.
Much like the marriages
they will take part in,
a simple rustle may dislodge them,
spilling their iridescent shimmer
onto the floor.

I saved as many as I could
giving them new life as bracelets
and other tokens of friendship.
Saved from a bag
kept in the back of a dark closet,
hearing how the dress doesn't fit anymore
and from busted threads when she tries.
Saved from hearing the negatives
of that beautiful day
recounted over and over
while the positives are ignored
and from being called "old fashioned" or "ugly"
by the next generation.
Those suicidal beads and sequins
almost jumped into my little-girl hands,
crying out for me to help.
I did what I could for them
while dreaming of the dancing
dresses of my future.

-FORTUNE COOKIE-

RICHARD YATES

Thomas Barlow walked the two blocks down, one over, from his office to the Green Dragon Chinese Restaurant so frequently that he now navigated by gut instinct more than thought. He worked at Vygotski's Advertising Agency where he struggled to stay awake while coming up with new and inventive ways of making deodorant and laundry detergent seem appealing. He made just enough from this job to pay for his studio apartment and his Internet connection, although on several occasions he had received bonuses from particularly pleased clients which he inevitable tucked into a savings account for a rainy day. As he approached the doors of the restaurant, it began to hail.

The Green Dragon was a dark but warm place with a six dollar and ninety-nine cent lunch buffet. Thomas came here twice a week, Mondays and Thursdays, although he had skipped last Monday on a whim, thinking it was good to "mix things up a bit." He hadn't been satisfied with the sandwich from Sidney's Café, so it would probably be months before he deviated from his routine again.

Thomas nodded to Miss Hark as he took off his coat, left his hat on, found his regular booth, and slid into the seat. Minh would come by in a moment to offer him a menu, but he didn't need it. He looked around the room while he waited. Red walls, hanging paper lanterns, the green-jade dragon behind the cash register, he found all of these things comforting, and wondered what the dragon would cost if he were to buy one for his apartment. He had nowhere to put one, but it didn't hurt to wonder.

He ordered the buffet, ate quickly and quietly, then tossed a large tip on the table. At the register, he paid for his lunch and bought a fortune cookie for a quarter. He thanked Miss Hark, said he'd see her Monday, slid on his coat, and pushed himself

through the door. Outside the hail had stopped, but fat raindrops fell so thickly he could barely see the other side of the street. It was spring so the water wouldn't be cold, but he was going to be soaked to the skin by the time he made it back to his office. He looked up at the sky and wondered how long the heavy rain would last. Thomas decided to wait a few seconds for a break in the downpour. Meanwhile, still under the Green Dragon's red and gold awning, he cracked open the fortune cookie and popped half of it into his mouth. He crunch a few times then swallowed, then fished the paper fortune out of the other half of the cookie. He tossed the rest of the cookie into his mouth and crunched a few more times as he read the paper fluttering in his fingers.

Thomas always looked forward to reading the fortunes, he was an amateur skeptic and loved the challenge of discovering how these general statements could be made to fit anyone's life, if the reader wanted to believe badly enough. Here, however, his usual theory was seriously deficient. The fortune said:
"You will die today"

Thomas Barlow laughed, an anemic cough of a laugh, and reread the tiny piece of paper that wiggled between his fingers. He twisted the paper around to see if anything was written on the other side. Nothing was. He flipped back to the words; they hadn't changed.
"You will die today"

If Thomas had been a religious man he might have mumbled a quick prayer to himself, but instead he laughed, again, a slightly less choked laugh this time. He was a realist, a devout believer in the world of science and reality, in the solid, mathematically describable, normal world of unfulfilling jobs and computer keyboards and lumpy mattresses. And he was certain that this...this "message" had been written by a person, typed into a machine that printed it out and, by chance only, had happened to end up in his fingers.

"Someone must have been about to get fired at the cookie factory!" he said, and pocketed the paper, smiling to himself.

He noted that the rain had eased a bit; it was still falling but not as heavily. He tugged his hat down tightly and plunged into the wet, though he did walk slightly faster than normal with the hope that he would make it back to his office without getting completely drenched.

Thomas spent the rest of the day at Vygotski's in a half-daze. He had a meeting with a small client, a local candy merchant who wanted to take his business on line, that went smoothly enough, but, more than once, Thomas forgot what he was saying during his pitch and had to be assisted by Ernie Watson, the project leader. The candy man didn't seem to notice, however, and said he loved the campaign designs and would be getting back to them as soon as he discussed the project with his wife.

Watson, on the other hand, was very irritated. He told Thomas that it was that type of sloppy work which could cost him his bonus. Watson suspected that Thomas might be taking some kind of drugs, painkillers, or something more sinister, and decided he would secretly leave a suggestion in Mr. Vygotski's office that they have a random drug screening sometime next week. This would allow him a few days to flush any traces of marijuana out of his own system before springing the trap that he was sure would get Thomas fired.

Thomas apologized. He lied, said that he hadn't been sleeping well lately, but he didn't really care whether Watson believed with him or not. Watson had worked at Vygotski's for two years longer than he had, but was always coming to work late, leaving early, and taking "sick" days which Thomas suspected were more from being hung over than having the flu. After letting him vent for a minute or two about "lost bonuses" and other potential disasters, Thomas left Watson standing in the hall and went back to his office to file his paperwork from the meeting, grab his coat and briefcase, and head for the bus stop. All the while, the four little words from his fortune lingered just behind his eyes.

"You will die today"

The bus ride home, which took about twenty five minutes, seemed to take hours. The rain stopped during the trip and, as he was walking the stairs to his apartment, the last glimmer of daylight was leaving the sky. He reached the fourth floor, shuffled listlessly down the hall to his door, unlocked it, and pushed inside. The apartment was black until he flicked a switch and a single bulb covered by a yellowing globe popped into existence. Thomas oozed down the short hallway, placed his coat, briefcase, and hat in the closet as he passed by, and made for the couch. He sat, slowly, an observer might have thought he was arthritic, and removed the fortune from his pocket before landing, syrup-like, on a worn tan cushion.

The paper in his hand was wrinkled now, three corners dog-eared and the forth blunted, from the afternoon in his pocket. He tried to smooth it flat with his fingers but failed. He laughed to himself again, but now the joke no longer seemed funny. It was a courtesy laugh, something he owed himself for thinking such silly thoughts: that a fortune found in a cookie could possibly know the future. He had to laugh, but it really didn't seem that funny.

"Well... If this is my last day on earth," he thought, "maybe I should do something. Maybe I should go out..." Thomas hadn't been "out" in nearly two years. And besides that, this was a Thursday. He hadn't gone out on a Thursday since college. He had work tomorrow, a much bigger client than the candy man. If he blew a presentation with Holstrom Jewelers, it wouldn't just upset Watson, it could cost him his job.

But who needs a job if you're dead?

"You will die today"

The words echoes in his head. Repeating themselves, at first in his own voice, then, slowly, changing into a quiet chorus of voices, some male, some female.

"You will die today"

It was a joke, of course. Someone at the cookie factory pulling one last prank before getting canned. It was, really, a great gag. But the chorus in his head kept singing, quietly, lulling him. Like waves at the beach. Repeating and repeating and repeating.

Being dead wouldn't be that bad. He wouldn't have to see Watson anymore. Or go to his parents' funerals. He couldn't handle that. Mostly because, whichever one went first, he would have to see that look on the other's face, the look. His parents had been married for sixty-five years, fell in love when they were still teenagers, had never really been apart...ever. They had three kids, two girls and a boy, and had bought a house the year before Thomas was born that they still lived in.

Thomas understood their love, but felt that what they had was pretty rare. His parents, what if he would never see them again? The chorus kept singing, sweetly, soothingly, in his head.

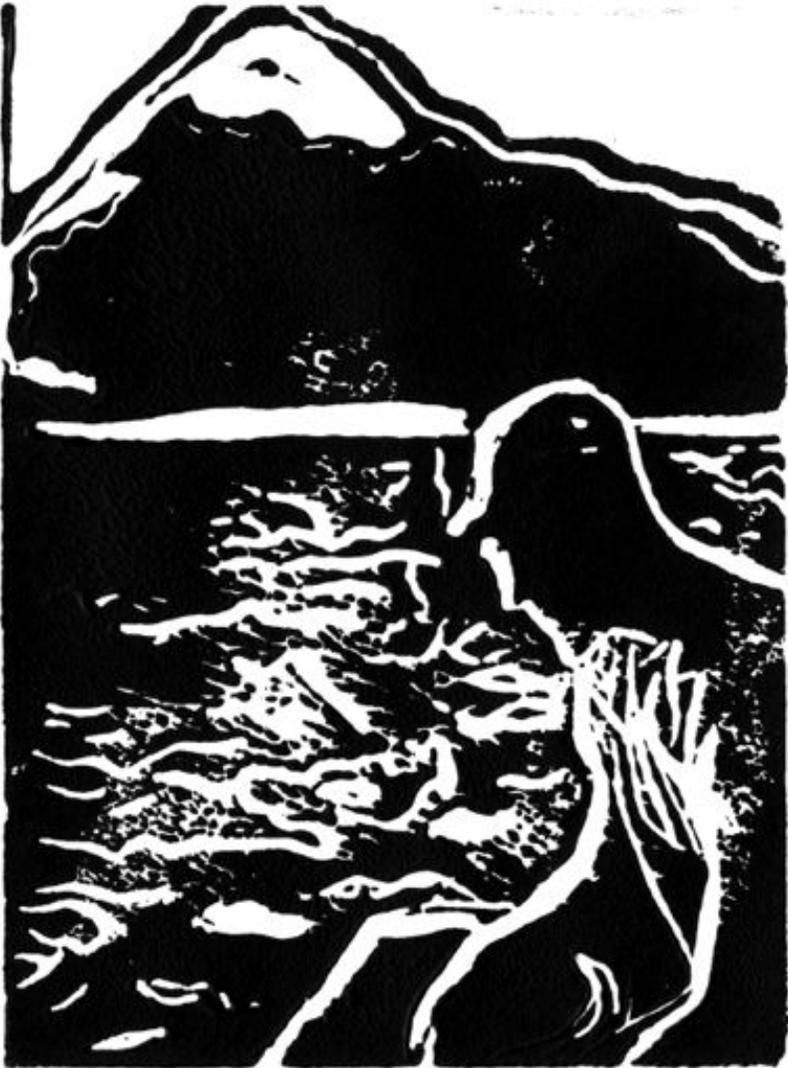
"This is ridiculous!" he said. He felt ashamed that such a calm and rational man was letting a tiny piece of paper work him up to such a pitch. He looked around and found his remote control and switched on the television.

Thomas watched the news for a bit, let the "factoids" wash over him, tried to connect with the world he saw on the screen. He watched the sports highlights, saw the weather forecast for the next few days—solid rain—and lost interest during an interview with a woman whose neighbor had been killed, mysteriously, by her own son. Thomas didn't hear whether the boy had been incarcerated or not, or even how old he was.

Eventually, Thomas lost the desire to pretend he was watching the television and got up to make himself some dinner. He grabbed one of the half-dozen identical frozen meals out of his freezer and slipped it into the microwave. After eating this uninteresting food, he went back into his living room and began to pace, occasionally stopping to push aside his curtains and watch the rain fall past the streetlight outside his window. And quietly, calmly, the chorus in his head continued to sing.

"You will die today"

Thomas clicked off his television and went to the closet. He grabbed his coat and hat and, before he could change his mind, opened the door to his apartment and stepped out into the night.



-RED HAIR, PURPLE SWEATER-

RICHARD YATES

When I was six, mom and dad took me on a long car trip. They sat in the front of our big green Monte Carlo; I was stuffed into the backseat with all of the overflow from the trunk. I'm pretty sure we were going to a wedding, some distant cousin who I remember only from photographs. Most of the trip is a blur to me now, but there is one element that has stuck with me, haunted me, to this day.

When you're six years old, a twenty minute drive across town can seem like it takes forever, so a journey across several states makes time stop dead. These were the days before Gameboys, iPods, or portable DVD players, and although we did have a cassette deck in the car, I have never been a big fan of Joe Cocker or Janice Joplin. Mom did give me a handful of coloring books to entertain myself, but I remember being frustrated by the car bumping around. When it occurred to me that I wasn't going to be able to keep my coloring inside the lines, I gave up, probably about ten miles into the trip.

Weeks later, to my mind at least, I think the whole journey took less than six hours in "real" time, we encountered a stretch of highway that was clogged with traffic. There must have been a car wreck or construction or something. I don't remember a specific cause. I do recall Dad sitting in the driver's seat and wrestling with a map that blocked most of his view of the road. Mom kept reaching up and pointing at the road when the car in front of us moved; Dad would

crumple the map into his lap, we'd lurch forward, then he'd go back to consulting the map. He was probably looking for an alternate route around the congestion, although I might have invented that motive in hindsight.

Our car continued to lurch and creep down the highway for what seemed like days to me. I craned my neck around Mom to get a better view of the road, trying to figure out what was slowing us down. Eventually, a bridge with massive grey metal girders came into view. It looked like a giant Ferris-wheel, half submerged in the river below. As we nudged closer to the bridge I noticed a woman standing on the walkway about halfway across. Her hair was long, flame red, and straight and moved in the wind like a flag. She was wearing a knitted purple sweater over a white t-shirt; I couldn't see what she wore below her waist because of a cement divider between the road and the walkway. She was staring out at the river with her back to the traffic.

The car surged forward a few more times bringing us closer to the woman. We were nearly alongside her when she turned, slightly, and I caught a glimpse of her face. I watched her wipe her eyes with a loose sleeve; she was very pretty. I remember her looking in my direction, noticing I was watching her. She brushed at her cheek again and smiled at me, a friendly grin with her red rimmed eyes mostly closed. Then she raised her arm and waved at me. I waved back. She seemed nice. Then she turned back toward the river. As our car lurched forward again, the woman pitched herself forward onto the rail and awkwardly, uncomfortably, rolled off the bridge. The last thing I saw was her bare feet slipping over the rail.

I looked back at the vacant space where the woman had been. The car jerked forward once more. "Mom," I said, "that lady fell off the bridge."

"What?" Mom said. I noticed that she was holding the map now.

"That lady. She fell off the bridge."

"Not now, honey. Mom has to watch the road so we can get to Aunt Elaine's house," she said.

"Which exit do we take? There's a turn-off right on the other side of the bridge. Is that the one?" Dad said. Mom went back to studying the map and I was left with what I had just seen.

I've dreamed the red haired woman hundreds of times since then, wondered what her name was, why she was crying. I'll never know. And now, as my memories fade and my childhood slowly melts away, I can see her less distinctly than I used to. Now, when I think back to that trip, that bridge, all I really see is a woman made of smoke, a pale mist with long, red hair that moves in the wind like a flag, and a purple sweater.



SPANNING OVER RIPPLES, NIEL HAYES



LUNCH IN LEICESTER, DANIELLE SHULKE

-VIETNAM-

WILL SPEARS

We left the strip club where I'd ordered my first legal drink.

"I'll take a whiskey and Coke," I said.

As the bartender walked away my dad leaned in, "MacNoughtons." She nodded and continued her way to the bar. The t.v. up on the wall shined off the scar on my father's cheekbone. It looked like a tic tac toe game that no one began. He slicked his graying hair back and shifted closer to me. "Never just order a whiskey and coke, they might screw you with Canadian Mist or something."

Whatever was in it was strong. I couldn't taste the Coke. Carmen said I could have hers too. I asked if she only used that name on stage. She said

her momma thought it up. Her ass was nice, and the tits were just the right size, but she needed some Listerine.

After I got my ritualistic lap dance I decided to sober up. We stopped in at the restaurant bar down the street from his house. They carded me just for sitting there.

"Hey Morrie, your son just hit the big two-one?" the waitress' jowls stretched and bobbed along with her words. We both ordered the sirloin. They cooked your steak on a large brick barbecue dominating the middle of the dining room. You could even cook it yourself if you didn't trust them to get the pink just right.

My dad lit up a cigarette and told me I wasn't a killer. He said that he knew me. He had raised me, and that I didn't have what he had. I had always taken that as an insult until now. In his first tour of Vietnam he killed too many people to count. That whole notion that the soldiers could walk through the jungle for weeks and not find Charlie was a bunch of horseshit. He shot someone his first week. My dad was a sniper and a ranger, not to mention crazy as hell. One time he had to cover himself with one of his dead buddies as twenty or thirty little gooks ran by with machine guns. He said he could remember the man's lips on his cheek. He could smell the formaldehyde of Vietnamese beer on the man's breath. I put a piece of steak in my mouth, but only vaguely tasted it. He took a bite also. His too-perfect teeth grinded the meat. Two months in, he got hit. Took shrapnel in the leg and face. The army sent him back to the states. He landed in San Francisco, got fixed up and unleashed into the sunshine. He limped down the streets, white gauze over half his face, like a procrastinator's mummy. "Baby killer!" "Rapist!" These were his new nicknames, and everyone seemed to know them. It was time to go back. He didn't belong here. As soon as he healed he signed on for another tour. I watched his face and waited for that faraway look that veterans always get in the movies, but it wasn't there. He remained looking at me.

During his next tour he began to enjoy the humidity, the weight of his M-16, even murder. He told me that when he was there, fighting in the jungle, he was happy. The ash on his cigarette seemed impossibly long, yet it did not fall. He kept taking short drags, which he didn't blow back out. Instead the smoke just leaked from his jaws, giving him the visage of a fleshy dragon. I gazed down to discover my steak missing, with only a few traces left on my knife as evidence. Apparently it fled alongside half of my baked potato with butter and sour cream. In Vietnam, he told me, the best way to fall asleep was to expect not waking up. The beer was mixed with formaldehyde. If you wanted a woman, only ask for a blowjob. Any other hole was either "crawlin' with critters" or laced with razorblades. He loved it. There, only his enemies were his enemies.

"Excuse me, miss. Does this look medium rare to you?" my dad asks.

The waitress wipes something wet onto the front of her shirt before snatching up the plate. Her shirt has horses and barbecue sauce stains on it.

He tells me about trudging through the jungle one day. This isn't a namby pamby jungle either. Mosquitoes the size of kiwis buzz about in swarms. Broad leafed bushes govern the ground. Thick vines entangle branches and ferns creating natural pillars. Green saturates all. His feet have a bizarre form of athletes foot. It makes crater-like formations on the bottom of his feet. And wherever the shit is it sticks to his socks and smells like rancid cheese. Then he tells me a rifle butt smashed into his mouth. Teeth shattered and pieces shot down his throat. When I heard it I couldn't help but wipe my tongue across the front of my teeth. Then I stopped. Then I did it again. My arms bunched up like a T-rex's, wrists attempting to touch my chin and my elbows heading for the belly button. That's a cringe.

Barbecue horse lady returns with a new slab of beef. I'm completely done, but she didn't take my plate. I asked for a lemonade. My dad was talking again, but some drunken asshole just happened to win twenty-seven dollars on video poker. So while I could

see my dad talking it appeared he had been dubbed over like a crappy Korean movie. The next thing I heard was that he took his leave in Thailand.

"Fuck going back," he says.

My dad had never told me anything about his war. I shifted my weight to the other buttcheek. I couldn't move any further than that. Dad's too-perfect teeth sunk into the new steak. He tolds me that the MASH hospital sucked. It's not that they were uncaring, just stretched too thin. He went back for a third tour. Bullet after bullet exploded from his rifle, entering skulls and pushing out the useless squishy stuff inside. Some were gooks, some were his buddies. For a week he stayed camouflaged on a hill, watching over the trails below. You could watch a soldier walk right into a booby trap (they were good at those) leaving shrapnel in his face. Or maybe their foot gets impaled on a pungee. Either way the best thing for them is the bullet.

"Killin' doesn't give ya' nightmares, but killin' friends. . ." He stamped out his long dead cigarette. Eventually he got hit again. That was enough, he told me. Didn't want to be greedy and take all the scars for himself.



A COSMIC JOKE, KELLY KEIGWIN



QUARTERSHELL, LOUISE WYNN



STEERING WHEEL SPIDERWEB, KRISTEN WEIGAND



JOANNE'S CATS, KELLY KEIGWIN

-MRS. K, FIRST GRADE -

ROSANN BARTEL



she toddles

her hornet yellow
sweater
and the florescent
lights
mesh circular

her harrumphing
breaths crush
our graded papers
and she whooshes
like a bull, red
glasses
for eyes

we're congealed
in place,
frail flower stems
as she scissors
closer,
hooks my arms,
jostles me
like an uprooted
weed

my horsetail hair
spins,
my teeth drum
like stones

she claws the paper,
gestures
at the deformed
frowny face,
my chicken scratch

she gurgles
vowels and snaky
consonants:
"I can't read yellow!"

and she toddles away

I quiver
and fold
into myself,
habitually lick away
the tears

"I like that taste,"
sniffles the boy,
my neighbor
"Saltwater. It's good,
huh?"



CAPTURED MOMENT, CHAREMON SMITH

-DRENCHED -

DANIEL RAMEY

I can hear the rain as it falls,
pitter-pat, spatter-splat,
Each drop has a voice,
crying out in the deafening chorus,
They opinionate and agitate saying,
this and that, chatter-chat,
Nature has made them similar,
yet they claim uniqueness,
After a time each drop sounds the same,
he said it, she did it.

I shudder to think what life might be like
as a raindrop,
Hurtling toward unfeeling earth crying,
see me, hear me,
Wondering if I mightn't be better off
staying in the clouds,
Saving my voice for a rainy day, spatter-spat,
waited and sat,
Yet I would be driven eventually
to join the rushing throng,

For I could not resist the chance
another might say, I see, I hear,
Come let your voice fall and be heard,
we love you, we need you,
But is it the rain I truly pity?
Voices raised, earth embraced.
Or do we, the unfeeling shoulders of earth
bear the Atlas burden,
So many voices we cannot hear, cannot love,
pitter-pat, sad as that.

This is my parent's bedroom.

A few things have changed over 45 years, but it still feels the same.

The glasses and magazine mean someone was recently taking a nap here.

I would bet money that it was my mom.



MOM AND DAD'S BEDROOM, KELLY KEIGWIN



CATHEDRAL TREES, KRISTEN WEIGAND

-NE FELÉJCS -

JOE PITKIN

He remembered the years he spoke that language
More than remembered the language itself.
When he left that country, some words
He lost straightaway, the shapeless,
Airy ones, like accomplishment and directory.
Others he kept awhile—door, for instance—as though
One day he would step through one
And he'd stand in his old house again,
Knick-knacks on shelves with their old names.
Still other words he remembered
Inexplicably until the end,
Beyond all use, like crow and snail,
Or wind and breeze, which in that tongue
Sprang from the same root and sounded like
One another, as in real life a wind
Sounds much like a breeze.

He remembered the sand and the burrs in the sand,
Recalled he had once wedged himself under a car
To find an oil leak, and come up
Flocked with tough seed, hooked into his sweater
In constellations: not cocklebur
Not thistle, not teasel,
But a clutch of teasing tiny things
He could not be free of. Some would
Travel months on his sleeve, beneath his notice.
And when he saw again, years later,
The spent forget-me-not
In his dead garden, rooted it up and felt again
That legion of seed on his sleeve, the word
Came to him across the years, the same in
That language as in this: ne feléjcs. Forget not.



SPICE MARKET, DANIELLE SHULKE



MIDNIGHT AT ST. MARKS, DANIELLE SHULKE