Segue is published twice a year, in May and November. We accept submissions of high quality fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, and writing about writing year-round via email. Before submitting, please read past issues to understand the sort of work we publish, then read and adhere to our submission guidelines. Past issues are freely available in our Archive: www.mid.muohio.edu/segue/archive. Submission guidelines can be found on the Submissions page: www.mid.muohio.edu/segue/submissions.

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Managing Editor: Michelle Lawrence
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The Alchemical Journey

I love surfing the myriad literary journals on the web and reading the most contemporary literature available. Online journals often publish exciting work by emerging writers that one can’t always find in widely published print journals, and the work is often free to read and easier to access than print journals. As a new assistant professor of English and Creative Writing at Miami University Middletown in 2001, I wanted to share this writing with my students, but in looking at online journals, I noticed something perplexing. In the creative writing classroom, I work hard to instill in my students a knowledge and appreciation for the writing process that goes into a piece of writing—process and product work hand in hand. But when writing students look at a literary journal, they see only the finished product: a publishable story, poem, or essay. In the world outside of the classroom, evidence that the writing process is as valuable as the work itself is only implied by published works; process and product are effectually separated. There are myriad journals that publish literature; likewise, writing manuals and interviews with writers abound in which the writing process behind literature is illuminated. It’s fascinating reading. Yet rarely do the two kinds of writing come together under one roof—and even more rare is the journal that publishes literature alongside writing about the craft of that same work of literature. Why should that be?

Thus the seeds of Segue were sown.

What I wanted to read—as a writer and as a writing instructor—was a high quality literary journal that celebrated the whole writing process, not just its product. A journal that could be enjoyed as a literary venue and used as an educational tool, simultaneously. One that was eclectic, publishing new work by both well-established writers and emerging or new writers, writing in a variety of styles on a variety of subjects, that showcased the process behind the published work as much as the work itself. I wanted to use this journal in my writing courses, and I wanted it to be easily accessible, and free. I couldn’t find a journal like that anywhere, so I created my own.

I sent out a call for submissions and invited novelist Brian Kiteley (Still Life With Insects, I Know Many Songs But I Cannot Sing) to submit excerpts from his new novel manuscript, The River Gods, along with a brief, informal essay about the writing process behind this work. To introduce Segue to the Internet world, I wrote a highfalutin’ mission statement explaining the journal’s name and our goal of illuminating the whole writing process—the “alchemical journey from inspiration to right words”—as I called it. In spite of—or perhaps because of—the mission statement’s grandiose tone, it remains largely unchanged to this day. I like how the verb and noun forms of “segue” capture both the process and product of an art that is one part science, one part mystery. To subtly highlight the sense of play involved in the writing process, I scattered “mystery links” throughout the site—alchemical
symbols that linked to strange and interesting corners of the Internet, which I updated from time to time. The mystery links are still there, now using images from ancient alchemical texts.

When the first issue of Segue hit the Internet, I couldn’t have been happier with its contents. There were first-time writers alongside emerging authors who had published impressive works here and there alongside more established authors who had books and editing projects under their belts. There were American authors and international authors writing on a variety of subjects. There was fiction, there was formal poetry, prose poetry, and everything in between. What more could a first-time editor ask for?

The real question was, what more could an editor do with a journal like Segue?

As planned, I used the first issue of Segue in my creative workshop, and the answer to this question quickly presented itself. While students were enthusiastically discussing possible interpretations of Bryan Walpert’s poem, “My Father’s Signature” (reprinted in this anniversary issue), one student angrily responded that Walpert could not possibly have intended to write about all the things her peers were getting out of the poem. She added, “That’s why I hate Shakespeare, too.” Shakespeare wasn’t great, she said. We made him great by reading into his work too much. Rather than continue debating the meaning of Walpert’s poem, I proposed we email him and ask him about his intentions as he was writing the poem. The class was momentarily taken aback by the proposal—was one allowed to simply contact an author with such questions? It seemed audacious. Enjoying the looks on my students’ faces a little too much, I didn’t tell them that Walpert was a personal friend of mine.

I emailed him about the discussion of his poem and my angry student’s question, and he responded with a detailed account of his writing process and the subject of intent. I shared the response with my students, and the discussion was remarkably animated—one of the liveliest of the semester. I saw I had an educational goldmine on my hands, and Segue Author Q&As were born. With each new issue of Segue, my composition and creative writing students made a project of discussing the literature and formulating questions for pre-selected authors. I emailed the questions to the authors and their responses fueled class discussions of the work, the writing process, and literature in general. The Q&As were so illuminating that I decided to publish them in Segue for anyone to enjoy and learn from. The authors work for free—for the joy of “talking shop”—and I’m deeply grateful to all of them.

In the five years since its first issue, Segue has continued to evolve: we’ve featured new or forthcoming work from such notable authors as Terese Svoboda, Diane Glancy, Denise Duhamel, Katharine Haake, and Ruth Daigon, as well as remarkable fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction from new and emerging writers from America and abroad. Starting with issue 4.2, Segue offered itself in two new formats—as a PDF file, and as a Flashpaper document—and began commissioning artists to submit cover artwork. Issues are as easy to view and navigate online as ever, but are now more easily downloadable and printable. In addition, Segue’s Writing on Writing page was recently created as a mini-scholarly journal, publishing essays, conference papers, and other nonfiction works on creative writing-related issues. Along the way, my web design skills have improved exponentially, as well, and Segue
is now more functional and aesthetically pleasing than ever before. (Thank goodness for that—the original site design is something of an eyesore to look at, now.)

And we’re not finished growing. Plans are in the works to expand Segue’s educational value to instructors everywhere, and who knows, maybe someday we’ll find enough funding to offer Segue in print (though we’ll always remain strong believers in making literature freely available on the Internet). As a related side project, Miami University Middletown’s print literary journal, Illuminati—Segue’s little older brother—has just gone online. Like Segue, it will also serve as both a literary venue and an educational resource: freely available to all, it will publish creative work exclusively by writers from two-year community colleges across the country, along with notes from the authors about their work. It will be the first such literary journal in the country.

Of course, I’m not able to accomplish all of this on my own. The student editor of Illuminati also serves as Managing Editor of Segue, offering invaluable assistance in corresponding with contributors, discussing submissions, creating each issue, and maintaining the web site. To former Managing Editor Britton Stockstill and the current Managing Editor, Michelle Lawrence, I owe a great debt of thanks. Likewise, Miami University Middletown has been immensely supportive of our efforts, which we deeply appreciate. And last but certainly not least, we greatly value the interest and support given to Segue from the writers and literature lovers around the world such as yourself, dear reader. Since we installed a web counter on our site in September of 2004, nearly 15,000 visitors from six of the seven continents have perused our pages (we’re still waiting for visitors from Antarctica). Because of you, we believe Segue will continue to grow as an innovative, entertaining, and educational venue for instructors, students, and writers all over the globe.

Featuring new poetry from Christopher Kelen and highlights from all our past issues, the current issue is our small way of expressing our gratitude to all of the readers and writers who have journeyed with us, and to encapsulate the alchemy of five years’ of work in a single issue for new readers. Selecting the works to republish was extremely challenging, and in the end we used highly subjective criteria. Our goal was not to publish a “Best Of” issue, but rather to select works which, as a collection, represent all that Segue was and is. Consequently, many excellent stories, poems, and essays from the past five years are not included here. But if you like what you read in this issue, I guarantee you’ll find countless other gems in our archives.

Enjoy.

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Eric Melbye, Editor
Middletown, Ohio
5.1.06
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Christopher Kelen

Kelen's fifteen part work, “autumn night on Song Mountain,” is the result of a collaborative project in the poetry of response across cultures. His poem is loosely based on the structure, imagery, and tone of a poem of the same title written by the late Tang poet, Meng Jiao. Presented here is Kelen's poem together with Meng Jiao's ninth century original Chinese text.

autumn night on Song Mountain

fifteen pieces

1
I couldn’t sleep
nor could the insects

the old man sobs
dry in his cot
autumn dew for tears
out doors

strength goes with time
weakness wove over hills
its horizon
sad tufts to stumble by
once

then a boat
travelling south
would bring me
where I’d been before

south of all days till now
2
colour of the autumn moon is ice
the old guest ghost thin nothing wishing
words from nowhere come
the withered tree one tune of wind
in sorrow sung
lofty the Wu Tong tree
bent crags of it
like mountain tops

no proof for what I must suspect

dew drips cold on the dreamer’s forehead
waking him to grey of light
3
like a sword
in this dance of wind
moon strikes
through open shuttered night

old bones
gathered in their watch beneath
what kind of man do they make?

insects too
yearn and yearn

greedy for the moon’s loss
birds call from nests
sun’s splendour forgotten

like a sword the moon rends
the still dark
that’s life
the house lacking doors
one is poorer in autumn

I seldom go out
the wilds are upon me
flowers show last of their light

feeble the songs
of creatures so small

see when I stand
the sick man’s impression
among his traces in the bed

even I who have lost
interest in everything
note this
bamboo and wind spoke
long in the night

my hidden home
with illness weak

in such a trance will gods, ghosts
know me?

as a drought fallen
these autumn leaves
won’t soak

gather into sunset

as thin as clouds are high
this shroud
wind laughs off

one line of smoke
curls vainly
carried

sour groan of prose occurring
6
old bones fear the autumn moon
like a sword it glitters
like a skull it shines

lonely bird builds its nest
in this empty mirror

gods wander floating
hang like ice

weaker than clouds
I walk the night
in muddy dreams

once poems spoke
now I see how little was said

today the piercing voice stalls hoarse
great dreams lie crooked
in this bed

what should bones fear of the sword?
the moon is ice like them
about to die
you have a choice of worries
that’s worrying enough
down on their luck
the insects cry
how loud the unseen
in human ears!
the grass itself is shamed among them
thin as hair in this semi-desert
yet shamefully it grows to seed
chrysanthemums in their brief style
here to be slandered, what more?
just so
I hide under the bushel to come
the ancients sing my praises
8
dry salvages
call of an army from afar
five tones of night
youth was dizzy with hunger
and now in dreams
a harsh wind
I glimpse the coming dark

cripples my legs
afar to afar
just for a poor hearth

call of an army from afar
the superior man
like poverty's mountain
fighting the villain

youth was dizzy with hunger
and now in dreams
I glimpse the coming dark

afar to afar
the superior man
like poverty's mountain
fighting the villain
just for a poor hearth

the more you covet
the less of life
thus heaven has ruled

cripples my legs
afar to afar
the superior man
like poverty's mountain
fighting the villain
just for a poor hearth

youth was dizzy with hunger
and now in dreams
I glimpse the coming dark

grey hair is like the autumn garden
stays fallen when it's cut
9
so far
in the cold
a withered wind
till dawn

moon
like a clean bone hanging
from what?

even the insects
grown hoarse
grown old

one blossom in the cold
spring stands
among these shameful others
sun rises and falls
life, death every day
only we old folk notice

the poor life has steadied these eyes
thus far
now I’m so short sighted I can’t see my door
so hard of hearing the wind won’t be caught

I could pass for a Buddhist statue
if only I could hear the prayers

still I am thankful for life’s beginning
I pray for as good an end

I’ve left the land of letters now
with rough folk here I plough

same round of season
stock of phrase

the south is rich with rivers and lakes
it’s barren up here where I’ll end

once I had thought to be swept from my depth
now I lie down and see how empty day is

plough, yes and I’m hungry
patch clothes by night which daylight frays

if I in these mountains cannot be pure
then who can grasp old works, old ways?

dim woodwind moves the spirits
young dragons aspiring won’t outwit fate

even in rags I keep writing in mind
my last breath will be given to teach

wisdom, will it be, in what the mind offers,
in what I say?
do not look into the timber for notes
only the heart can hear
a host of furious fancies

no words for it
but more each day—
desire’s result
a Buddhist would say

am I a Buddhist?

the old man’s every step
comes lighter than the last

too sorry for myself
never sorry enough
for or to the world

if I could get out of bed
would I ever make it back again?
better stay tucked in with Oblomov

out there there are hungry people
wishing to be fed
the cold want more clothes

moths in the laurel
those leaves not so chaste

once the grovelling’s got out of the way
history’s all stinking words

dying’s the best time for regret
you won’t have the chance again

I may be wounded
my words out of order

at least it’s warmer in here
than out there

then bring my horse of air
Tom O’Bedlam

ten leagues beyond the wide world’s end
methinks it is no journey
withered branches howl through the wind
what souls are lost in these thorns here

old insects cry like dry iron
beasts startled freeze to jade

there’s no choking the mind from this
no covering the ears

there’s no companion for a worthless youth
wasted with worries always to come

I missed the way to the clear stream below
now I float like a feather
revered merely for the age I’ve survived
with neither the words nor the strength
to invent
nor to augment
this howling
this withered branch of wind
the freezing air breathes in sick bones
an old man’s body grows to ice
desiring what little remains to desire
I cling to the pains I’ve become

hunger till the heart is spent
I listen to those sage souls near
can’t come up with anything better
than ‘take your medicine, dear’

I know what I am capable of
—telling kind words from hateful
this poison has too strong a smell
and yet I can’t detest it

it’s winter punishes the heart
lighter, thinner till the body breaks

look up to the gods who manage our luck
there’s no point winking now
the Yellow River returns to the sky
fidelity in its meander

the human heart? it’s not so good
once gone you’ll seek it out in vain

Isles of the Blessed, Peng Lai—inventions
pragmatists know to chase wealth and position

keep to the way that can’t be told
once lost
the strings, the sword both broken

as poems grow ancient
so the snow dazzling white

the clothes of mine
they grow like moss

I advise you to brush
away day’s dust
scorn has killed many
without blood spilt

its bark like the poor family’s dog’s
beyond pathos
emaciates the listener

not so many words are needed

scorn makes ghosts weep
and scorn is unending

Qin Shi Huang Di burnt worthless books and men
scorn would have been more effective

scorn rises again from its own ashes
who can afford to scorn fire?
秋 懷 之 十 二

流 運 閃 欲 盡，
枯 折 皆 相 號。
棘 枝 風 哭 酸，
桐 葉 霜 頭 高。
老 蟲 乾 鐵 鳴，
驚 獸 孤 玉 咆。
商 氣 洗 聲 瘦，
晚 陰 驅 景 勞。
集 耳 不 可 遏，
噎 神 不 可 逃，
蹇 行 散 餘 鬱，
幽 坐 誰 與 曹。
抽 壯 無 一 線，
翦 懷 盈 千 刀。
清 詩 既 名 腹，
金 菊 亦 姓 陶。
收拾 昔 所 棄，
咨 嘆 今 比 毛。
幽 幽 歲 晏 言，
零 落 不 可 操。
Christopher Kelen

My “autumn night on Song Mountain”:
an instance of a poetry of response—in dialogue across cultures

I hope in this short piece to give the reader sufficient account of the context of my poem, “autumn night on Song Mountain,” which title would be a fair translation of the title of the Tang Dynasty Meng Jiao poem which is the principal model and inspiration for this work. Let me be very clear about the status of my poem, “autumn night on Song Mountain.” This is not a translation. Rather, I hope that it is a work rich with the tradition of the language in which it is written.

If you found that last paragraph a bit of tangle then that’s because there are some tricky relationships—I’d call them between-nesses—at stake here. First things first then. The Meng Jiao Poetry Project—from which the “autumn night on Song Mountain” comes—is a long-term collaborative effort, the purpose of which is to produce—not translations but—variations, adaptations and poems otherwise inspired by the work of the Tang dynasty poet, Meng Jiao (often transliterated Wade-Giles as Meng Chiao). This is a project in pedagogy, with the practical aim of producing new poems.

Of course it is easy to say ‘not translations but...’; the fact is there are various continuia in operation and under negotiation here and it is far from easy to say where translation ends and where ‘response’ kicks in, where respectful imitation shows that a tradition is understood and even being added to as opposed to the place where the wheels are rutted or even the accusation of plagiarism might stick. Working with or from a classical source, one asks how much of the original ambiance should be maintained, to what extent the thinking in the poem venerated may be modernized or subjected to anachronism, to what extent these might just be cheap tricks.

Working with my graduate students at the University of Macau, working from the extant œuvre of a poet more than a millennium dead, I am mindful of three key
‘between-nesses’: working between China and the West (between Chinese and English), between the historical then and now, between the teacher and the student. In the tasks I have undertaken in this project I am myself naturally between poetic and pedagogic work. For those who would like to read more about the process in progress and its various stages, an article written about half way through the first phase of the project can be found in Cipher Journal, at: www.cipherjournal.com/html/kelen.html

The Meng Jiao business got going because, where I teach at the University of Macau, I was looking for a way to get as good results from students’ poetry writing as I felt I was getting in short fiction. I was looking for a way to get them past various problems of poetic composition (e.g. greeting card cliché, craven imitation of foreign forms not properly understood). I was mindful of the fact that I was teaching in a context of culture where mimetic methods in teaching and learning—and where working from models—was not stigmatised as in the west. One might cynically see this observation as ‘the plagiarism problem through rose tinted specs’, but in fact I think there are here some genuine cultural differences in the way models for writing practice are approached. Knee-jerk reactions to what might appear superficially as a lack of originality have resulted in some missed opportunities for more effective teaching and learning across cultures.

Just a brief word on Meng Jiao himself. I have written more about the man elsewhere, but understanding a little of his career will I think cast some useful light on the nature of the project and its process. Not only was Meng Jiao a self-identified loser in his own lifetime, he is really one of the great complainers of Chinese literature, and has been famously regarded as such by later poets*. A classic example:

Let’s compete with our tears,  
let them pour into a lotus pond;  
then we’ll wait this year and see  
whose flowers drown in salt water.  
(transl. Barnstone and Ping, 153)

* For instance the Song poet Su Shi wrote two poems ‘On Reading Meng Jiao’s Poetry’ and writes ‘I hate Meng Jiao’s poems’ and that they sound to him like ‘a cold cicada wail’ (Barnstone and Ping, 152).
Working through his surviving oeuvre—apart from general maudlin observations about the cruelty of nature—one might cynically say that the first half of the corpus is dominated by poems about failing examinations and the second half by poems about the deaths of friends and acquaintances. Getting through the extant works became tedious for these reasons but it must also be admitted that one never had to wait long for a gem which would brighten things up. What is wonderful about his work is both because of and despite his status as what Australians would call a prize whinger. As far as his reputation is concerned in the long term, perhaps Meng Jiao was just unlucky to have had so many poems survive, especially since so many were thematically similar. Let that be a warning to us all!

Despite all these doubts and misgivings about the man and his work, I maintain that the object of this project has primarily been tribute, not mealy mouthed but in the manner of a dialogue between persons inclined to speak their minds. Our tribute takes the form of keeping a conversation going. Because we have got to know the man and the work along the way, responses take a range of forms. Some poems are close to the originals; perhaps they can or should be considered translations, some are more in the manner of objections, arguments with the man, questions thrown back, even slaps in the eye. In the case of the present work—my ‘Autumn Night on Sung Mountain’ is a poem steeped in western classical allusion and consciousness of the world as it is today, and though structured after Meng Jiao’s original, certainly cannot be considered, even loosely, as a translation.

It is difficult to do justice here to a complex and evolving set of negotiations; but this I believe is what good pedagogy is all about. My hope in writing this piece is that the observations will be of interest and use to others who might be served by a similar teaching/research agenda. Good process in pedagogy needs to be witnessed so that it can be critiqued and evolve. For these purposes empirical methods and an effort at self-reflection are indicated.

Let me now show the reader the process in practice. It is probably easiest to think of the first phase of the project in the following steps or stages.
1. students create poem glosses
2. together with students I talk through the glosses line by line against the originals, looking at alternative means of expression
3. I write drafts of English poems in response
4. we check for conflicts with originals (not in order to eliminate them, but to understand the distance at which we are working)
5. students write drafts of Chinese poems in response to originals and English poems

Here is an example of the original with the gloss, followed by my poem in response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>二十六. 偶作</th>
<th>Incidentally work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>利剑不可近，</td>
<td>Sharp swords are not approachable, beautiful girls are not approachable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>美人不可亲。</td>
<td>(or Do not go near sharp swords. Do not get close to beautiful girls.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>利剑近伤手，</td>
<td>Going near a sharp sword will hurt your hands. Going near a beautiful girl will injure your health (literally: body).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>美人近伤身。</td>
<td>What makes a road risky/dangerous is not its width (literally: A road is risky not because it is wide [implication: the road must be risky for other reasons]). Going ten steps can destroy the wheels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>道险不在广，</td>
<td>While the sadness of love has nothing to do with how many times you fall in love. Once would be enough.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>十步能摧轮；</td>
<td>(Literally: Love does not depend on quantity. One night could hurt your mind/spirit.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>情爱不在多，</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>一夕能伤神。</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mine: 

incidentally

stay away from sharp swords and stay away from beautiful girls
each equally bad for the health

it’s not the width of the road makes it risky
one wrong step can bring you to grief

or one wrong beat of the heart

This single example does not do justice to the range of response more typical of the project but it should give the reader an idea of the process as it applied in the first phase. The second phase of the project (completing the cycle of response in English and Chinese) is still at an early stage, but the table of responses and translations immediately below should give an idea of some of the possibilities in process going forward from this point. Briefly, on the left you can see the original poem by Meng Jiao, immediately to its right, a collaborative translation of same. Next column right, my response in English. Next column right, Amy Wong’s or Hilda Tam’s contemporary Chinese response to all of the foregoing. Last column right, a collaborative translation of that response.
to thank my friends for giving me charcoal
translated by Kit Kelen and Hilda Tam
in green mountains a white house a kind heart
he gives me charcoal - two dark ingots
freezing I sit through the cold’s thousand layers
the charcoal burns, brings Spring to the furnace
gives morning glow and sunbeams shine
to straighten this old bent body of mine

thanks for the fire
(a note to my neighbour)
white house in green mountains
where the kind man lives
he gives me two dark ingots of charcoal
better than rice and better than silver
warmth of the fire
this charcoal gives
straightens the body
peels off the cold
sunrise and sunset
spring, summer bold
better than rice and better than silver
warmth of the fire
this charcoal gives

Collaborative Response
by Kit Kelen
and Hilda Tam
charcoal dreaming
lie huddled
thin sheet
lids half lowered
shivering
saw
the charcoal you gave me

毋忘炭
Hilda Tam
我蜷縮在薄薄的被單裡
矇矓中
看到你送來的炭
春天
由此而生
炭灰
已成沃土
它孕育出來的花朵
我都通通送你

charcoal
translated by
Kit Kelen
and Hilda Tam
I lay huddled
in a thin sheet
half awake
half asleep
the charcoal
you gave me
sprouted, grew
to ash
to fertile soil
I will bring you
the flowers
when they come
| Sprouted, grew into a tree of fire when I wake perhaps flowers are ash might I give you this poem instead? |  |  |
If the examples in this chart do not do justice to the range of response through our treatment of the entire oeuvre; this may be because the graduate students have started on the safest ground, i.e. the ground closest to translation. In the texts immediately above I think we can say that the differences, poem to poem—response to response—are relatively slight. Certainly, if our objective were (as it may well at some point be) to produce a book of Meng Jiao translations, I would in these particular cases look closely at both the text offered as ‘translation’ and the text offered as ‘response’; my hope would be to publish the best poem sufficiently faithful to the meaning expressed in the original. I realise that in making so glib and slight a manifesto vis-à-vis philosophy of translation—I omit to engage with a whole history of thought on the issues involved. The point for the present is merely that in these cases the separation of translation from response is somewhat vexed, and in fact a point of interest for those who work creatively across cultures (writing and teaching) from established literary models. Given that I have a huge corpus of responses from which
to choose, the likely solution will be (as earlier foreshadowed) to separate those responses closest to translation and re-work them as such, to select for publication the ‘responses’ which have the most interesting relationships with (and distances from) the original text.

Illustrated by the table above is the potential open-ness and/or endlessness of the process, which is another way of saying—its dialogic nature. In ‘Autumn Night on Sung Mountain’ we see a much wider range of response—and much wider variation in proximity to the original. I feel I can say that in this work I have written a poem which is self-consciously between traditions.
Relevant works and works cited:


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Bryan Walpert

Waterside Pavilion Without a Rowboat

Once you sat amid a field
of water in a boat
that bobbed with what you
presumed to be the current,
as in present. But you were
drifting towards an edge,
a pavilion or gazebo
that these years later
you've reproduced in paint,
absent, as they say, your presence,
as though to picture it
as it might have been then
without you. Perhaps this is
what it means to be forgotten,
what anything looks like when
you don't look over your shoulder:
Fields of the forgotten stretched
in rippled rows of negatives:
I was never there. We never met.
There is a rowboat floating by
that gazebo. Or it was there,
yesterday. Look harder.
Paint it as if you remember.
Paint it as if you have drifted
up to yesterday, surprising it.
Still Life

*after Georgia O'Keefe and Man Ray*

A woman watches apples,
their bowl cast its signature
on the sidetable, an electric fan

buoy a petunia
in a white vase. A viola floats
into the room.

From her perspective,
an apple is shaped
like a heart. She practices
her husband's signature,
its floating loops,

a viola scrawling a faint score,
the signature of his heart
scratching across a page.
A fan blows light
from the room, a petunia
drowns in air,

apples float
free of perspective
in a signature bowl
while a viola draws
the room in dusk.

The rhythm of the dark.
Night is a perspective of the heart.
My Father's Signature

How it swirls across the page,
a series of loops like a planet in orbit,
as though he seeks
a center after seeing its resurrection
a thousand times on paintings
of trees and autumn

leaves adrift in abstract autumn
days, each day unpeeling paint from a page,
each leaf an abstract painting
to encircle this studio, an orbit
of leaves resurrected
like a series of letters seeking

surface after surface, a search
by someone trying to stay, an autumn
refusing to believe in its resurrection
as seed from snow—itself a page
of shapes, each flake only itself, no orbit
of remembrance and return, though a painting

might capture how the earth paints
itself with an absence of color that seeks
to uncover everything from itself, as an orbit
of line in the shape of autumn
reveals dark limbs against the page
he's left blank in spots, resurrecting

stars long dead and resurrected
by distance, a pointillist painting
teaching us to distrust the page,
as he distrusts it, seeking
then discarding it, as autumn
trees discard themselves when our orbit

tilts us from the sun, an orbit
that promises resurrection,
if only as memory of autumn
in the green of the paint
of a fresh season that seeks
to cover winter's blankest page,
the way a signature, in the autumn
of an orbit, seeks a page
on which to paint its resurrection.
Shall the axe boast itself against the man who uses it?
Is the saw greater than the man who saws?
Can a rifle strike itself against the man who lifts it up?
Isaiah 10:15

Hi’hi’hai’yai!
Hi’hi’hai’yai!

1982

They go spudding down the road. Feathers hanging from the rear-view mirror.
"What's up?"
"Got a man whose dog killed his son. The man went on a rage and killed the dog, a daughter and his mother. We're going to call him back from the crazy world."
The spirits fight over who rides in front. Father Spud has to separate them. Puts two in back with Buzz between them; one in the third seat with Girl boy. Father tells them he will stop the van and put them out on the road if they don't straighten up. They could forget their mission let the man stay crazy. They are messengers from the spirit world. How could they fight? They should remember their mission from the Old One the way He intended.
The spirits look out the windows. They see the hawks in the air that like the currents above the highway.

† "A Time to Get in Gear": Some of the ideas for the spirit's songs are from The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890, James Mooney, University of Nebraska Press, 1991.
"Where this crazy man?"
"We'll know the road when we come to it."

Father looks at Mammam. Another one of those.

Sometimes the sky is behind a black-out curtain, old and worn, and only sometimes can they see the light behind it. That is the stars at night. Other times the sun is all light and they wait for the black-out curtain.

"Why'd you hitchhike?" Buzz asks them. "Can't you get around on your own?"
"I thought you could get to the place you supposed to go," Mammam says.
"Nobody pick you up?" Girl boy chuckles.

"Not many see us," the spirits say, talking at the same time until their voices sound like bees in the van.

Father Spud stops for gas. The spirits look at the ice machine. The convenience store.

The spirits have come with a message. That's what the spirits are. Messengers from the Messenger Himself. The High Plains Holy Drifter. He roams the world. His eye goes over the whole earth seeking who will recognize Him. Seeking who will take their eyes off the earth just once to see inside the sky. Or who will look hard enough they see the lessons just out of sight.

What's up is a puzzle. A game with the spirits. But what the Two Teth's pick up is not a game, the Two Teth's being Father Spud, Mammam, Girl boy and Buzz. What they pick up is a narrowing of the highway. Road construction. The highway lanes changing, the arrows showing the shift in lanes. The pow-wow van jagging on the highway, over the hump of road that crosses the median and they are single file in the oncoming lane. The ones coming from the other way don't like it either. Their cars frown as they pass. The road is theirs now. The Two Teth's are the defeated and have to ask permission to pass on their side.

"Once two women claimed the same man as their husband." The spirits tell a story to pass the time. "They kept fighting until the messenger said, let's divide him, so each woman will have a half, and the women agreed."

Mammam squirms in her seat. But not as much as Father Spud.
Sometimes something reminds the spirits of the old world, the world that was here before this one. Maybe the cut-out of the Badlands they pass. Or a particular edge of the sky. Father Spud isn't sure. Then the spirits grow quiet. Or they ask to stop, but Father Spud keeps driving. He sees their longing for what they knew. He thought it would be over when he left the earth, and he would never look back.

The spirits bump against Buzz who asks them to stay by the windows.

I come from the Father I come from him.  
The crow.  
The crow.  
I cry like it.  
I cry like it.  
Caw, I say.  
Caw!

The spirits are cawing in the pow-wow van. What else can spirits do?  
They don't caw too good.  
"Huh. Huh. Uh—" one of them interrupts.  
"That was the road there."  
"No—" the second one says.  
"We're not there yet," the third one says.  
"That the road we passed down to Pine Ridge?"  
"Yop," Father Spud says. "South through a wedge of the Badlands. Then the prairie. Highway 44 to 35. Manderson to Wounded Knee to Pine Ridge."  
"Turn around."  
"There's another road ahead that goes to the same place," says Father Spud.  
"That one's gravel," Mammam reminds him.  

They turn around and take the road south from the interstate and drive through the dirt bluffs of the Badlands. Then the pastures with spotted horses. Mile after mile of prairie grass and a few hills. They drive past the white frame churches standing on the prairie. Little square boxes, cardboard-like, with a steeple.
The devil— Hi'hi'hai'-yai!
The devil— Hi'hi'hai'-yai!
We have put him aside Hi'hi'hai'-yai!
The White Man Above.
He is our Father.
He is.

Them spirits— ha! They always making jokes.

When they are nearly to Pine Ridge, Father Spud turns onto a dirt road at the insistence of the spirits. Howard Chewie written on a mailbox crooked on its post. A dirt road to a rusted trailer, several sheds, broken-down cars. Too late to back out.

The man had a dog who mauled to death his only son. In his rage, the man got his shot gun, killed the dog, a daughter and the grandmother, and wounded another daughter.

The rifle took over. He couldn't stop shooting. The rifle kept loading itself. Chewie's wife, mother, daughters tried to stop him. He shot at them, missing his wife and two daughters. He shot the trailer. He went wild. His eyes had snow in them, they said.

His mother had told him to watch the dog. Yet Howard Chewie neglected the danger. Ignored it, rather. The dog growled at the boy. The dog was not in the mood to tolerate children. Maybe it had been abused before it wandered onto the Chewie place. Maybe the boy reached down to him, maybe the dog thought the boy meant it harm, but the dog turned with a vicious bite to the boy's face, and once the injury was made, the blood, the screaming, something primal was loose, and the dog continued its attack until the child was dead. The dog lay in a bloody pool at the edge of the yard. The coroner's van had left with the bodies of the boy, the girl, the grandmother. The rescue unit had the other girl nearly to the hospital in Pine Ridge, a clinic, actually. What the spirits and the Two Teth's found was a woman, Mrs. Chewie, Howard's wife, still crying, broken between sobs, and the two girls huddled together under the porch of the trailer where they often played. Howard Chewie had disappeared down the dirt road. The pound had come for the dog, or what was left of it.
The spirits talk to the girls under the porch. They ask Girl boy to sit with them. They talk to the mother and ask Mammam to sit with her. They hear the police sirens. The police dogs. They want to find Howard Chewie before the police and the dogs do. They are standing in the yard and then they are gone. They move across the prairie without moving.

"Why didn't they do that to get here?" Buzz asks.

The police close in on Howard Chewie. He won't give up. They shoot. Howard Chewie is wounded. He falls. The dogs rush him. The police pull the dogs off Howard. They hand-cuff him. They pull him to his feet. He struggles. They hit him with their fists. He is in the back seat of the police car, stunned and cuffed. He is in a sleep-walk. The spirits get in the police car. The police don't know they are there.

The spirits sing their healing song.
We give him a name:
He could not stop shooting the gun.
He could not stop shooting the gun.
We take his finger from the trigger.
We take his hand from the gun.
We call him back:
We give him another name:
He will stop shooting the gun.
Now he will stop shooting.

Howard Chewie is in the hospital, under guard.

What is a shot gun to strike out on its own? The spirits talk to Howard Chewie. Should one of them stay with him? They argue. No one wants to stay.

The girl's in the hospital too, in another ward. The spirits take a lightbulb from their medicine bundle. From their parfleche they take a cord. They plug it in her room and light the blue lightbulb.

We touch the blue wound.
We touch the blue wound.
It is in her where she can't see.
It is inside her there.
We light the blue wound with blue light.
The light draws the hurt into itself.  
We unplug it from the socket in the wall.  
The blue wound is gone.  
The blue wound is gone.

The spirits love electricity. They use it in their ceremonies whenever they can.  
"Your father was going to shoot himself," the spirits tell her. "You stopped him before he did."

Now the Two Teth's arrive at the hospital, which is more of a clinic, with Mrs. Chewie and the two girls.

"I want to go to the trailer," the wounded girl says.
"He shot it full of holes," Mrs. Chewie says, "you're better off here."
"We'll patch it for you," Father Spud says.
Mamman, Girl boy, Buzz look at him.

The spirits return to Chewie's place. They ask Father Spud to drive them in the pow-wow van, feathers hanging from the rear-view mirror. Lodge poles tied on top. Teepee-hide folded underneath. The Two Teth's could unwrap it in the Chewie's backyard. They could feed the tethered horse. Dig post holes for a fence. Help the girls through their nightmares.

The spirits have a healing ceremony with sage on the Chewie place. They have a cleansing ceremony in the trailer with sage. The brillo pad of the spirits. Comet scouring. Holy. Holy. The Messenger Himself. The Maker. The Old One. Even the Two Teth's hear voices in the sage. The spirits buzz the trailer. They think it has wings.

The Two Teth's were on their way to the pow wow. They were stopped. The spirits always intrude. Interrupt. They don't know a good pow wow when they see one.

"That girl in the hospital is going to recover," the spirits tell Father Spud. "That's the pow wow where we go."

In the two girls' nightmares, a family drives up. They unload their gear. Just what the Chewie's need.

"Who are those people?" The girls ask.
"Their name is Two Teth," the spirits say.

"Two Teth?" They ask. "What's that?"

"The original name must have been Two Teeth. Who knows? What is One Teth? What is Two Teth? You go with what you got."

It is a thought they toss like a ball.

The Two Teth's also try to sleep. Mammam paints the white sky black with a brush that spreads the paint thin. That's the night sky. The old white paint showing through as stars. Maybe the black-out curtain will cover them a while. How could they fit in a world in which they don't belong? Not even to their own kind. Their own needy kind in trailers and tract housing.

"What do you want me to do?" Mamman looks at Father Spud. "I'll know it when I see it."

"It's scary to dance at the pow wow," Buzz is telling the two girls in the yard. "The drummers try to trick you. You think the drummers will stop but they go on. You think they will go on, but they stop. If you mess up, they don't let you forget."

"I think we got the van in reverse," Father Spud say. "Get it in gear. Let's move ahead."

The spirits sing their funeral song in the cemetery:
They will eat pemmican—E'yeye'yeye'!
They will eat pemmican—E'yeye'yeye'!
We say so, we say so,
the Father says so, the Father says so.

"Your sister's on a far road. She caught up with your brother," the spirits tell Mrs. Chewie and the girls. "Your grandma and that old dog trotten there too." At that Mrs. Chewie cries. Mammam tries to quiet her. She frowns at the spirit. The one doing all the talking. "We washed them with the ceremony," the spirits tell the Chewie's. "They won't carry blood into the next world."

The son, daughter, and Howard's mother are in the afterlife. The spirits assure the wife, the two daughters who hover near their mother until it looks like their feet aren't touching the ground.
The dirt cemetery is pitiful. Twists of tobacco. Braided sweet grass. Medicine bundles with wads of sage. Hand-made crosses. A few stones. The prairie wind sweeps over them nearly pushing them over. It isn't easy to stand on the prairie. One spirit loses his cap. Well, it was the cap he borrowed from Buzz. Buzz frowns.

Death. Death. They know it on the reservation. The reservation roads staked with white crosses. Accidents, alcohol related. Careless driving is a form of suicide on the reservation. A wish to step into the sky. A release from hopelessness.

Mammam divides Father Spud with her words. Her complaints. Why are they still together? Buzz and Girl boy reel from their fights. The Two Teth's catch the Chewie's ball and in that ball is their own strife. The red dog death. They are bit. They know the rifle. The rage. They step over that line. They are going the same place. Disaster from which they never recover, despite the blue lightbulb of the spirits. No matter, the Old One Himself can patch them up. They have been hit. They have been defeated. They have been blasted with poverty. Alcoholism. Unfaithfulness to husbands. Wives. Beat kids. Get them shut up. Put the meanness in them. The mean red dog bite. They over there now. In the other world. The ancestors. The Chewie's boy and girl and grandmother and dog. They are beyond the peep holes of light. The peep-hole show of this life.


Euchala.

Euchala.

Wadu.

"Which way is it?" Buzz and Girl boy ask. "Is it this way or is it that?"

Father Spud goes to the Pine Ridge Hardware for rifle-bullet repair. The Two Teth's plug the holes in the trailer. Buy window glass. But wrong size. Go back. How much trouble to put up fence? Trouble. They buy a bag of cement to set the posts in the holes. Girl boy fixes the broken swing in the yard.

Are these spirits really here? Or are they a vision they encounter? A trick? A step into the other world? It is high summer. Yet the Two Teth's see spirits with eyes like a white-out blizzard.
The wounded girl comes back to the trailer from the hospital.
Howard Chewie is in jail for murder of his mother and daughter.
Attempted murder of his wife and three other daughters. The trial upcoming. It will be quick. Guilty. Guilty. Every one of them.
Impossible space

Armagh, Northern Ireland, 1980

The first time I bled, I feared my sex was a weight 'round my neck, thinking How can this leaking thing be me? Is my only role cleaning up while others fight? In time, I saw the wounds and the grief of my sisters, on their backs in the shadow of the occupying forces. I figured a gun could become a functional prosthetic, a limb we'd been denied. With the barrel, I drew a line 'round that vulnerable place the uniforms come to claim.

Disarmed, and thrown inside this prison, where showers and toilet trips are a chance for the screws to try to beat the hope out of us, we began to learn how to speak with silence, through bricks. We stayed put in our cells, until, with a feast that had us drooling, they lured us out. We should've known better. Soon enough, the screws, grinning, had us surrounded and reduced to this dilemma—go limp or let some reflex like pride make it worse.

Either way, their clubs have the last word on our bodies. Stripped and searched, we're given back our uniforms of bruises and shock, thrown back into our cells, alone, locked down. Every single privilege is removed. No-one's allowed out for exercise, the toilet or food. To stop us emptying our pots out through the windows and spyholes, they block them up. How do you move when you're backed into such a small and hollow corner?

Words come. Our brothers, pinned under the same fist, are painting slogans on their cells with their own shit and piss. At this, and from all of us at once, our blood spills itself, makes its rich and rhythmic speech. So, we do not clean between our legs—our hands know how to translate this menstrual ink into a stigmata these thick walls can not resist. Now, the screws see only filth, can't find the stomach to close in. They've lost
sight of us. It is a new smell, their fear, as we
spell out how continual our resistance is. This flow,
from one side, speaks death; from ours, like water, ...
Shivering, alive, we let go of the bank, join the ranks
of those who've made their bodies into shields or signs
men in authority step back from. Here, at last,
is the impossible space we can move in. What now?
Emily Rapp

The Road Through

The mothers’ dark mother tongues weave images inside my ear syllables that sound the way light must feel as it moves through lace its path undetectable until it is already viewed a skirt-across-the-ground sound I remember a bug balanced on the wooden log of my leg and the only proof of the bite was not pain but two toothy indents a tiny cleave worn near the hinges until the leg was too small and we sent it along to Bosnia with legs of Vietnam veterans who left one in the jungle and another in the snow now a crackle in a throat I remember when I thought the horse’s bones were breaking making the sound cold branches do before they crack but it was the reins in my hands pull of skirts over dark thighs and eyes watch the white sky of my leg work the clutch when a strange beast sprints across the road the other leg hangs useless and hidden quietly collecting sweat I can pour into a glass at the end of the day the road through Windhoek to Okahandjah is long and dusty we are too many women and tongues in one van voices organize in grid patterns over the gravel I have to watch and all I see are sounds through the open window along the street are the tenement houses with faces that droop like the mouths of these women when they say words that must mean “Children” and “Death” because here tribes are stacked on tribes dominoes of hate and children with yellow-faces open their rotted out mouths and scream with glee no one has a word for they are moving bundles of mud one girl with a used straw twisted out of her hair a plastic feather one girl who shouts from a pile of shit makes all of us monstrosities at our destination a woman crouched under an open square of window where the toughest of notes is forced from the church walls to be beaten by bugs and birds’ wings and this woman stands to reveal a twisted limb and eyes that know there is a word for disabled people in this African tongue that means stepped on by an elephant a wildebeest a cheetah a bear a god all of the women are looking at her and then at me and I think of knitting needles clicking together in wombs I think of Psalm 139 and being fearfully and wonderfully made patterns and the effort of their resistance stepping into the shadow of the foot coming out crushed through the
ground of the wood-walled church with the proof of a vision alight in my palm a savage spinning they want to peel back and see the patterns of my memory see how their own

sounds fell as light or shadow they want the skin of my chest to thin and fall away so they can see the squeeze and shut of an organ immaculate beating perfect inside the body

squashed days that close like wounds they want stories and words and the whole pornographic painful slick shit of it all they want juicy parts that squirm and vomit and cry they want damage I turn and set my face away from them they cannot have it

*Okahandjah, Namibia*
Terese Svoboda

From Tin God

Chapter 9

Kill him! is what the whisperers say. The way they say it hisses.

Wiping the vomit from his face with the grass, the man walks on, batting at the hissing in the grass with more of the grass he has ripped off. This hissing might be a snake’s, it might be solace. Walking away is all he can do about his being lost and nauseous, with the evidence of his lostness so sour behind him, so somewhere. Walking away from the hissing gives him a direction too. He is not lost now.

Ever one to avoid confrontation, even against his own interests, Tall Pigeon Eye says, Don’t be too hasty. If he’s a man, he might have brothers.

Some of the whisperers make shrewd sounds and nod and the boy begins again about what he saw in the night: the army of metal-plated men and the moon, about god as light.

Tall Pigeon Eye and the others listen because boys old enough to hunt are men. They look at the boy and each other in the silence after.

Send the boy back to the women, suggests Tall Pigeon Eye. The women can throw sticks to see if he is a god. Tall Pigeon Eye has friends among the women. Women paw at his backside, his pigeony part, as if that will tell them all their secrets. He does encourage it.

It is fair, the others decide, this handing off of responsibility. A god is not someone you take lightly, or sometimes singly or one-sexedly. A god is not someone you kill quickly, in a hunt. They should ask the women. The women of course would be distracted if they came to see god themselves.

Why doesn’t Tall Pigeon Eye just oust the man by changing water to wine or its grass-people equivalent, or stand on top of water and the like? He could do that. But
it isn't worth it to him. This man with his metal hat will run out of steam soon enough. Surely he is not god, despite all the local stories about blue-eyed mongrels landing via saucers on the sandbars and setting up shop. Tall Pigeon Eye just doesn't buy it, even though they have no legends about pigeons that he himself can point to for his own ends. Well, he could raise a couple of dead to press his point, but then he'd have to make appearances, keep regular hours, organize followers—not yet, not yet is what Tall Pigeon Eye decides. Besides, he likes to think of himself as an office incarnate, someone who's around more to do the files and keep the desk clear and the general rah-rah going, and not so much for the personal, as someone to petition and pray to.

On the other hand, is this guy here to help him out? Tall Pigeon Eye quashes that thought, he has his pride, his territory, his people. He has his style. They all do. Buddha, a sit-around kind of god, Shiva, all wild arms and dancing, Jesus, casual, posing with a lot of lumber. They probably had rivals too.

The boy is sent.

He passes the god as he runs from the camp toward the women but his quiet passing is just another breeze and rustle to the man, who keeps walking. He knows the grass must end. The ocean ended. How long were they on that ocean? Weeks and weeks. The grass must end. It will. He will make it end. By walking.

The boy is still running when he reaches the village clearing. Gasping, he runs up to the women who are at work chewing deerskin. The dogs halt their constant sniff and fight at their feet to greet him. The women give him a sprig of something to help him catch his breath, so he can ask them what the men want to know.

The women spit out the deerskin, consider their answer. They ask him if he is hungry, then they feed him the best they can cook: roast bird, new beans, and mush—no bread since he returns without warning. The best food will test his truth-telling, that's what they know. With smiles and encouraging gestures, they take the food away after he's started, they take it away until he tells the story different three times, then they let him eat it. If he tells his story wrong once or twice, it is less likely invented than questioned or elaborated or toned down.
The women decide what to say, what to do. They don't decide easily, by laughing at the men who are always reporting huge snakes or eagles that lift away their catch as a way to explain why they return with so little. Instead, they believe the boy. It is his first hunt and he is the youngest ever to go—in height only halfway up the grass—and so he is not likely to know the stories that men produce for themselves.

They send the boy to fetch his sister. She is picking beans on poles they erect to Me, notched poles still so fecund they sometimes root and put out leaves, though sometimes it is from the fish the women put in under the poles that makes them root, and sometimes it is just the way the pole is pushed in. This pole is tall and the girl, hearing her brother, calls out to him to help her, to jump and pick the bean or beans just out of her reach.

She isn't full grown but she's shorter than he is. You can tell from the size of her feet that her body is reworking its proportions, sending out more growth. This near ripeness is what the women want. By the power of herbs and sticks, whatever they gabble together out of things elemental, the way they do now with electricity and sand into chips to fix time, to carbon date, they decide she is ready to be ripe. Besides, all the other girls have been taken.

But she loves her brother. He teases her for having only buds for breasts like a man, then teases her breasts. Watch them grow, he says, and they rise.

I see the worship of one body for another. I'm not incensed. They always come back to me in time, needing something less complicated, more one-sided, less of the body that changes, bodies that present wants who can know? and keep on wanting.

She follows her brother to the camp because he says she must, not because of what the women say, tricking her out in ocher, wrapping her ankles in hide, moaning and chanting about how beautiful she is. She knows why she is chosen and beauty isn't the reason. She is solemn and her face does not give off the glow that beauty does. Unless she is with her brother. To be alone with her brother in the grass—yes, she will follow him.

They roll in the grass, alone, laughing silently.
Of men at hunt she knows nothing and he tells her nothing. These are the men of the village, fathers of girls her age and others, men who complain of dirt in their fish or quarrel over rain and what to do about it. Hunting, these men are changed and anonymous, and show none of the furtiveness they have with women. Even her own father is no one to her, he owes his thoughts to the grass alone and to the other men, but not to the women or children. What would her father say anyway? Good luck, you're doing it for all of us? What do the parents of the virgin ever say?

The men talk of her feet, their large size, and of the swale of her hips. But not of her.

Tall Pigeon Eye is her father. Not exactly, of course, since he is my incarnate. She and her brother were orphans and Tall Pigeon Eye, being somewhat orphaned himself, that is, let down out of a cloud, was given their care, having no other. He doesn't know about the brother and his love for his sister because, like all good fathers, he doesn't want to know. Besides, she is his daughter, she must love him only.

But now custom has it that Tall Pigeon Eye must cut out. Fathers, even in the hunt, in such a situation, cannot be trusted. There's no blame in this. The others would do the same if it were their girl. That's what they say. Even if the results prove what he believes—that the man is not god—they sense, like some high-tech physics experiment, that his presence will queer it.

They don't know about the boy and his interest.

Tall Pigeon Eye exits, stage right as it were, steps quietly into the grass and awaits some arrow or quail call or whistle to bring him back. He wanders far and rages, for as much as he feels he's an office incarnate, this is the most important moment of his time on earth, as it is called, and he has to be out of it. Why? Why? It will take years and years of minor miracles and suggestive soothsaying for him to regain his position now. For once he is tempted to throw thunderbolts.

He doesn't because while he is gliding swiftly and furiously through the grass in debate, he finds the man's lost sword. He pulls it out from between the thick grass roots that seem already to grow over it. He turns it over and over in his hands.
Anyone who needs such a weapon must not be god. This is the proof that he needs. He hefts the flat of the sword onto his shoulder. Here they seldom see metal at all or even sharp sticks. Mostly bones. He sights along its hilt to the end, aiming it like the blunderbuss soon to come. He drags it behind him like some kind of ploughshare. He chops into the grass with it. He flings it into the air and it flashes over the grass like a signal. He flings it again. Like a thunderbolt really he flings it against the wide blue sky under which stands his daughter, already far away, wearing nothing but hide around her ankles in front of the men and her brother, and farther, the man with his head down, plunging through the grass, and even farther, the others with their swords, one of whom looks up at a faraway glinting.
Daily Affirmations from the Last Republican Yogi

Much has been made of the ways
in which our flesh will someday fail us
but little of the fact that it was ever
there at all, look at the body’s
invidious trappings and the lungs not
caving in, look at the people boarding the train
and all their blood not spilling out,
the portico not collapsing, the comet
not hurtling from space
flash-flooding the stadium floor
and whupping the continent’s sorry ass,
all those condos lashed in the storm
and all those windows not breaking,
all those hidden cameras in rest stops
not beaming our DNA to the moon,
not zapping it straight through the orbit
of Quicky-Marts and banks,
so many murderous hatchings
in so many unmarked jars,
all those maple sin the yard and all
those leaves not falling off.
On the Eve of the Solar Flare

Here in the lesser kingdom the living
greet and pass through,
loving and failing each other in all
the usual ways.
Rooms stand empty, their people afoot
in the blank and snub-nosed dark

for the cause of the greater Good that is
the body sprung from its trap.
The skyline trussed as if within

some grander fiefdom of need,
pages gone unread like beds
no one has slept in.

When the storms came,
there would be nothing
in their wake left standing:

Not the houses,
not the trees, not the hands
they would put their hands to.
Ginger Knowlton

a lobsterman's sleeve

all of those pictures would have told me nothing.
maybe seeing your wife there, swimming,

it would have crossed my mind to turn off the oven.
there was nothing in it but dry brush and enthusiasm.

I know an 82-year-old painter who has sketched nothing but ovens.
baking, for me, is inevitably, or, it is an inevitability,

I would rather be swimming with your wife.
all of the lobster pots are full, but there are no lobstermen.

this is not meant to be funny. I think that we would have
a good time in the ocean. we would swim under a pink moon

in a pearl grey sky. you would dangle bits of string from a blue bridge,
pieces of wire for soft crab meat, and you would not share.

we would sit with all the lobstermen and watch you finally feed yourself.
butter and tears would streak your face, and then

you would wipe your mouth on one of the lobstermen’s sleeves.
then you would grin.

I will swim far far off into the grey ocean until I become a perfect
little speck. your wife will take you to the A & P, just

where you have always wanted to go.
lost socks

grey tube socks with red stripes droop from the shower rod.

in all of the shopping carts clattered down the alley
your old socks are overflowing and stolen
from the dumpster by a man ranting
about communists. a man straddles
the saddle of his bicycle
one foot on the ground.

your long legs are strewn across me
long-neck beer bottles in the dumpster down there
and a man mimicking your noise

it is quiet in here now
and red cows on a green hillside
in a low moan only one hundred miles away

no one has ever seen the hydrogen atom
it is entirely theoretical

on the first cold day red cows huddle together against wet
green grass
forget the dead you left they will not follow you
one cow rolls over on its back

there, some legs in the air.
The Origin of Stars

One: Hubert’s Thoughts

"If two people start walking in completely opposite directions, will they end up where they started or someplace altogether different that you never could imagine?"

This is what Hubert was thinking when Hubert was six. Hubert had a large, square head and narrow shoulders, and an uncanny predilection toward thoughts that would alienate him from other children. Nonetheless, Hubert was a child who thrived, and all things that were good happened to him.

That is, with the exception of his head, which started out oversized and misshapen, and only grew larger as the rest of his body, for years it seemed, did not. In time, the matter of his remarkable cranium gave rise to such concern that Hubert was subjected to a series of—ever inconclusive—medical tests and procedures. Sometimes apologetic or impatient, and almost always mystified, the doctors would conclude that Hubert’s head was, square. Perhaps the mother, however well intended—and here, the doctors would look tactfully away—had lain him on his back when he was a newborn, or there might have a problem with her birth canal. In private, some surmised that Hubert’s head could be an adaptation they did not fully understand yet, or a subtle harbinger of more deformities to come, but in they end there was nothing they could prove. And anyway, what did it matter? Take him home, the parents, who were good and earnest people, were advised, give him every opportunity, love him fiercely, as love, even then, was believed to be a powerful healer.

But as Hubert grew, the squareness persisted, becoming even more pronounced in the years preceding puberty, which, when it came, defined the angles the angles of
his pate with such elegant precision that, from certain discreet perspectives, it might even be said to be attractive.

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A thought Hubert had: *if you point a flashlight up into the sky and no physical matter interrupts its path of light, will a child on another planet a hundred million years from now see it as a message from a small boy—Hubert—or as just another dead star?*

At this time Hubert was hardly more than three or four—no master of physics or logic—but yet this thought foretold with some precision what would prove to be Hubert’s lifelong passion for the vast mysteries of the night sky.

*How do stars die?* he wondered. *What is a star, a planet, light? For that matter (Hubert was just a boy), what’s death?*

But when he asked his mother, she shooed him away. And when he asked his father, his father said, “Stop pestering me.”

So Hubert said, “Can I borrow your flashlight?” and went out into the neighborhood where the other children were playing hide-and-seek and kick-the-can, and didn’t want to be bothered either. Alone, Hubert shined his light into the heavens, and thought his thoughts, and dreamed his dreams, and by the time he was a young man, he’d developed such a expertise at projecting incandescent beams that he worked his way through college as a spotlight operator for celebrity events and the openings of such things as big shows or buildings.

By this time, Hubert’s childhood was behind him, hastened along by the untimely death of his parents in a heli-hiking accident somewhere high in the Canadian Rockies, and because bad weather and terrain delayed the recovery of the bodies for some weeks, Hubert spent several weeks mourning their passing in little acts of memory, all the scenes he could remember from when he was a boy—the camping trips with his father and his flashlight, the stern jut of his mother’s jaw marching him into the principal’s office to demand an apology for the unkind remarks
of some other child, their twinned beaming faces at his high school graduation. When the day of the actual internment finally came, Hubert was quite done with his grieving and receptive to the kindly ministrations of sensitive coeds, who, in the absence of anything truly consoling to say, could do nothing more than to take Hubert into their beds.

Then, when Hubert was a senior in college, Hubert discovered a star. It was not a big or important star—in the whole hierarchy of stars, right down there on the bottom—but it was a star, nonetheless, that came to be known as Hubert’s star, which he wrote up for a small, but well-regarded journal, and which garnered sufficient recognition that Hubert soon found himself being invited to scientific conferences and awarded time on important telescopes in remote corners of the world.

Don’t mess with me, I am Hubert the Head, Hubert thought.

Hubert had this thought at a prestigious research center in the rugged outback of a distant continent where, for months, he’d been searching for other new discoveries by night, and not sleeping well during the day. The appointment was a plum, but badly timed, coming as it had shortly after his parents’ demise. Torn between the solicitous attentions of his coeds and the rigors of his impending fame, Hubert had a hard time making up his mind, but really, fame was fame, and surely there’d be time for other girls later.

Then nothing turned out as he had expected.

(First), the meteoric rise of his nascent career stalled abruptly, as:

(Second), despite his deeply held conviction that some dazzling new find—a planetary system or evidence of life—lay just around the corner, the night sky persisted, month after month, in resisting his most concerted attentions, and:

(Third), Hubert’s mind started to drift.

Two things sustained him in this time of frustration—(1) his unwavering belief in his own destiny, and (2) the girl he’d discovered lurking on the edges of the compound, watching the giant telescope that watched the sky. Unlike the other indigenous peoples, who traded openly with the compound staff and drank
carbonated beverages by the case—Coke and Dr. Pepper and 7-Up—Hubert’s girl (for this is how he came to think of her, just as he’d once thought of his star as his star) crouched secretively and for long periods of time behind the compound periphery bushes, and unless she was approached—when, in a heartbeat, she would turn and disappear, as if, Hubert thought, into thin air—she betrayed no discernible movement and made no perceptible sound.

Hubert had the oddest feeling about this girl, who had a broad, flat chest, a sly demeanor, and the widest feet he had ever seen. Really, it was intense. And perhaps because he had always somehow pictured himself settling down with a diminutive blond in the helping professions, Hubert could not help but suspect that it was the girl’s furtive shadow and dark gaze that was keeping him awake. Either that, or her tattoos, which began at the crown of her hairline and worked their way down the round sides of her face, intertwining at the back of her neck, like fingers.

So Hubert thought about those fingers for a while, and then he thought about them closer up, maybe touching something, maybe him. Then Hubert decided he needed a lure, and so it wasn’t long before he was spending his free time on the internet, searching for things to amuse the girl: a translucent pink clock radio, ballet slippers, sunscreen, a red enamel teapot with blue wings. Hubert left his offerings on the edge of the compound, and the girl, whom he watched through one of the small research telescopes, would—sometimes—scoop them up with such surprise and delight that Hubert himself would come close to a swoon with his own, vicarious pleasure.

But she was hard to please and unpredictable, and for several weeks running spurned, in this order: green socks, a diamond heart necklace (Hubert would save this one for future use), silk stockings, crayons, and a jack-in-the-box. Finally, she relented and appeared, once again, to be pleased by such plain and uninspired gifts as a potato peeler or bag of jewel-colored pop rocks. At such times, Hubert’s pulse would quicken, leaving him light-headed and slightly euphoric, and what he wanted—this he wanted more than anything on earth—was to be close enough that he might hear her exclamation or even touch her, her hand or her face. But he couldn’t get it
right: she would take the paper clips, but leave the ice bucket; she liked nail polish, but not lipstick.

And as other new stars continued to elude him, Hubert’s time on the telescope was drawing toward its end. What he really needed was an inspiration, like a lightning bolt or even just a light bulb, but despite his most concerted efforts, the night sky remained opaque and unyielding, and Hubert’s hopes for fame—for something big—a galaxy or imploding black hole—had begun to fade.

Ok, Hubert thought—for really, he was only still a boy, to whom all things remained not just possible, but likely—even just a new comet would do.

Two: Hubert’s Experience

One day something happened that Hubert, in his whole life, would never attempt to explain or understand and was rarely known even to speak of, even among his closest friends and his most trusted associates. As far as official records were concerned, the event itself could not really, properly speaking, be said to have occurred. And of course, it all began at what must have been the height of Hubert’s frustrations (and his most sleep deprived), and though later he would understand that these were exactly the conditions that would produce, throughout his life, his sharpest and most sublime thoughts, at the time he did feel as if he might be going mad. Hubert, after all, had his cosmic destiny, and he was pretty sure this wasn’t it. His head was square, his folks were gone, and he’d left a bevy of coeds behind—at the very least, he was owed a moon somewhere—multiple moons, Hubert thought—round and white and glistening—serene, he thought, like sleep.

Hubert thought that, but what he didn’t think was that it was all—all—part of a grander destiny than he could ever hold together in his square head, even after the conclusion of the event. For naturally, it never would have occurred to him to imagine that the girl had her own separate destiny and that a time was coming when,
between the two of them, only one will would prevail—and that it was not going to be his.

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On the night the event commenced, the single moon above traced yet another perfect parabolic curve across a clear star-splattered sky, as if, Hubert thought, to mock him. And it was past midnight to boot, and Hubert had been straining mightily at the telescope since his shift began just after dusk, focusing and refocusing on—nothing. Hubert knew this—how could he not?—but still he persisted until his eyes burned and his toes felt scratchy with restlessness. Also, it was hot, and his head hurt.

This had been going on for hours.

Then, very slowly, a bead of sweat began to roll—slowly, slowly—down the flat plane of his forehead, tracing an irritating path toward the corner of his left eye, until finally, Hubert was forced to turn away, however briefly, from the pernicious parsimoniousness of the recalcitrant telescope to wipe at his brow and maybe reflect, just a little, on the hopelessness of it all—and that, that very moment, was when it happened, and something far below caught his eye.

Well, that part can be verified, as that part is the final notation Hubert ever made there. This is what he wrote: he wrote, something! 1:19 AM. Then (as it may be surmised) he went out to meet his destiny.

What Hubert had noticed—there on the edge of the compound, in the inky darkness, squatting beside a low spiky bush—was—her! Yes, yes, Hubert thought, it was, indeed, she! And yes, she was squatting there, motionless, as in the day, but more deliberate now, more incisive, as if she were waiting for something—what? Hubert thought, and he felt a little dizzy, which was not uncommon lately. His toes itched something fierce, so he scraped them together. But when he looked again, still, the girl had not moved, was crouched in the same spot, at the same angle, not
at all, he would reflect some time later, unlike himself at the telescope, poised and alert, and yes, Hubert, *waiting*, and yes, he thought again, she was looking at him.

Then, his pulse quickening, Hubert thought: *she is waiting for me!*

At this exact moment—the moment Hubert saw her watching him and had his thought and quickening of pulse—their eyes, despite the darkness of the night and scientific compound, somehow met, locking together for that one fatal moment, and then she turned away, and when she turned back—this is something he would have sworn to (if he had talked about it) all the remaining years of his life—she was holding something out to him in the palm of her hand, she was offering it to him, of that he was certain, a gift (to reciprocate, perhaps, for his own small gifts to her), but what she was extending was something quite unearthly, and it was glowing, almost luminescent, almost, but not quite, green, and it looked, from where Hubert sat at his telescope, far beneath him, as round and as smooth as an egg, and like nothing so much as a new, small star.

After Hubert disappeared, the compound buzzed, if only briefly. Almost to a one, each of the other astronomers who had been aware of the suspicious economy of exchange that had been going on between Hubert and the girl felt he had it coming. Different kinds of people, they insisted, should keep to their own kind, and what could Hubert have been thinking, they said.

Among the current fellows, there was represented a predictable range of scientific inquiry, from quasars, to planets, to the darkest of dark matter, the blackest of holes (although one of the junior fellows—a large-boned woman graduate student, not much more senior than Hubert himself, with a corrected cleft palate and a bush of white hairs sprouting out of her chin—was secretly searching for signs of intelligent life in distant galaxies). Among them, as well, an ordinary range of human pettiness prevailed, from disagreements over soap, to the length of people’s showers, to who drank the last orange juice. Hubert’s disappearance was just another item on the long list of small and large things that could possibly go wrong (and did), so after the initial hue and cry, everyone got discreetly back to work, with some of the most
competitive among them completely delighted to be splitting his portions of fresh fruit and pudding, along with his telescope time.

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In the weeks and possibly months that followed (he had lost all sense of time) Hubert was astonished at his inner strength and capacity for adaptation, not that he didn’t suffer. The first thing he rued was his sun screen, which he thought would be the death of him when the girl just kept moving, even after sunrise, out into the blazing lunar landscape, all rocks and ravines and high, airy plateaus. Hubert warily eyed the first blush of dawn, limpid on the line of the horizon, for he knew what was coming, but though he still had time at that moment to turn back, he did not. It was as if he were tied to a tether to the thing the girl held, closed up now in her fist, but with little excretions of greenish light escaping between her fingers, and Hubert was powerless to stop.

Naturally, he burned, his skin searing a radiant pink all over and so unbearably tender that it puffed up like a limp balloon and he grew feverish to the point of delirium, until the girl at last relented and holed up in a shallow cave where, for several days, she rubbed a noxious-smelling salve on his body and incanted a low chant that, to Hubert, sounded far away and ominous. When he came to his senses on the morning of the fourth day, the girl was squatting at his feet, staring intently at the rotting red onions of his knees. They did not speak, for of course, they did not share a common language, but as he watched she began to peel long patches of dead skin from his body—his shoulder, his cheek, the soft part of his chest just over his heart, and then (this is one part he preferred, his whole life, not to remember) she made him eat it, and after that he was impervious to UV radiation and never burned again.

Then his feet were a problem, for Hubert had gone blithely out to meet his destiny wearing nothing but a pair of ragged shorts, his favorite threadbare t-shirt, and the ancient flannel slippers he wore during his telescope time. They were a deep
berry red, like an old claret wine, and Hubert had had them for years, but looking at them now he longed for his hiking boots, or at least his new hundred dollar Nikes (an internet treat just for him) with glow-in-the-dark electric blue stripes and air anti-gravity soles, for indeed his favorite slippers would last less than the first night of walking, after which the girl would give him the same plastic flip-flops he had left out for her only a week or two before, and then, to his dismay, nothing. They were moving quickly, many miles a day, over mostly rocky terrain. If Hubert had not been somewhat naturally thick-skinned, this also might have been the death of him, but the girl was headed in only one direction, and so Hubert hobbled on, applying the all-purpose, noxious-smelling salve to his own feet twice a day, until they were thick and padded, like paws.

This is what Hubert will remember from that first journey. It is, for the most part, a memory of skin, the largest organ of the body, which despite its elasticity and remarkable resilience, is laced with nerve endings and exquisitely receptive to pain. Also, Hubert will remember rock, he will remember walking, and he will remember that, in the whole course of what at times seemed an endless and possibly pointless journey, the girl held onto the rock that glowed. This was the lure, and Hubert followed it, until all that remained of his prior self was just his curiosity and unaccountable desire to touch both the girl and her stone.

Other details about what might have happened during those long days of walking have long gone missing from Hubert’s memory. If he was afraid, if he found the girl alluring, if he had any regrets, it is impossible to know. All that it is possible, really, to know is that Hubert went out one night to examine what the girl was holding in her hand—a faintly glowing orb of some natural greenish element—and that, three years later, he came back a strangely altered man.

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Later, Hubert lay staring up at the sky on a mud-colored, flat sandy rock, oddly pleased with the blue blur above. When his glasses had fallen some months before
deep into a narrow crevasse, he had, it was true, experienced a momentary tug of something, some half-remembered panic, or a bitterness out of the past. The feeling had been very strong—for how in the world could he ever live without them? Then, like a wave, it had passed. At that very moment, the girl had reached up to touch his eyes, so high above her own, and he had just been able to make out the traces of her, as if she were confident that now, at last, he would see.

By the time Hubert noticed his own lost glasses, cracked and askew on the girl’s small face, he’d have long since ceased to miss them, for the sky above him had since grown as soft and as close as a blanket, and many of the stars he had loved his whole life had just gone missing from it—poof—into a blank space, or absence, as absolute and sudden as the path behind him back to the telescope and his prior life. But other stars seemed nearer, almost as if he could grasp them in his hands, and others had turned fat and furry and embarrassingly intimate. Even the moon was rounder and more three-dimensional, not flat in the sky like a math equation. Now, lying there, on the rock, with his square head wedged against it and high above a rocky plain, Hubert felt serene and as if he had been destined his whole life to end exactly here, where he had determined to stay as long (if that’s what it took) as the rock itself to figure out why.

The girl and her clan lived in a small camp below him, mostly rocky overhangs and caves, and although Hubert had never paid much attention to this continent, its politics, history, or its people, it now struck him that that these people made love, slept, and went about the business of their lives as remote from the business of what had once been his life as if the worlds were somehow only shadows of each other. This interested Hubert. And it was not that he’d lost interest in the heavens above, but that, like another light bulb in his head, he now surmised they might have somehow here descended—that this could be another planet, far away from home.

Mainly, Hubert tried to keep his thoughts to a minimum, and one of the things that he tried not to think was that his new condition was somehow permanent, that in truth, he had slipped between the two worlds, where he’d now be lodged forever, as incapable of returning to his as he would be of entering the girl’s.
At first, it had just been him and the girl, walking and walking. Then there had been the days of delirium, during which his dead parents hovered and scolded.

“Now you’ve done it,” his father said.

“Oh go away,” his mother said, “you’re not even ours.”

“But Mama,” Hubert said, “I’ll eat my peas—I promise!”

Afterwards, were more days of walking, with little rest, until at last they had stopped. Within moments, Hubert found himself surrounded by a handful of people—a few men and women and a smaller scattering of children—who, though small and furtive, like the girl, seemed otherwise clear-eyed and well fed, and they welcomed Hubert and the girl with a great deal of food and some drunkenness, and then, for several days, sleep.

When Hubert finally awoke and took stock of his surroundings, he lay in narrow, umber hollow surrounded by rocks the color of sand and smooth-skinned and curved, like giant eggs. There was water, but he did not know where it came from. The food was mostly dried, mostly meat, but there were also grubs and occasional slender greens. Scarred and gentle, the girl and her people almost never spoke, and though at first Hubert waited patiently for someone to tell him ok, what now? they went about their business of survival oblivious of him, taking stock of his presence only by such considerations as delivering food when it came time to eat or bringing him bundles of grass to sleep on. If Hubert had been thinking, like the old days, he might have suffered from anxiety or, perhaps, regret, but the last time even a rudimentary idea had formed in his head was so long ago it was more like a dream than a concept.

But no, it was not that what was happening to Hubert felt like a dream, or even that it was a dream, for Hubert was certainly there. Already his skin had turned brown and tough, and the ruined tatters of his shorts and shirt were all that remained of his prior self. If only there were a mirror here, or a pool of limpid water, something to show him his reflection, to give him back his image, Hubert thought, even a piece
of bent tin would do, or the flat link of wristwatch he’d ordered for the girl from the internet. Well, no again, for by the time he had this thought Hubert would have recognized nothing of himself but the blunt, square shape of his head, and even that, increasingly obscured by hair and beard, was not so oblique as it once had been. No, it wasn’t that Hubert was having a dream, but that, instead, the dreaming was going on all around him.

The girl was a dreamer all right. She could close her eyes and summon up visions at will, just as she had summoned up Hubert himself, and the longer he lived among her and her people, the more he understood that they were all like that, waking dreamers, who lived among only stones, and the mysterious water, and who were silent, but not, Hubert knew, dumb. If Hubert had been an ordinary hiker, moving quickly through this inauspicious landscape toward a destination spot—a waterfall or famous climbing rock—he’d never even have noticed them, living there among only rocks. Each member of the girl’s clan lived in a private cave, which Hubert knew because he saw them disappear into the earth, but he could never find their entrances, their little nooks or crannies, nor could he anticipate when they might reemerge to refresh themselves with bits of food and water, or some small communion.

Hubert could never have imagined that human beings could spend so much time isolated in dark places, but then neither could he ever have imagined that the business they were hard at work on in their caves was the fundamental business of dreaming the world into being. It was hard work, and there were not very many of them left to do it. Hubert didn’t know this, but the girl who had fetched him did, as she alone remained awake to keep an eye on him, waiting for the light bulb to pop on in his square head, the only thought that mattered anymore, so that she—and now, thinking this, the girl let her face go dim with private pleasure—could get back to her own cave and her dreams.

Except that Hubert, despite an entire childhood riddled with ideas that rattled around in the corners of his head like—he thought, for no apparent reason, acorns—was suddenly and utterly bereft of them. Language itself seemed to have gone out on
him, as week after week, Hubert squatted in his overhang, watching the nearby rocks for any sign that might yield an answer, though he’d long since lost track of the question. Well, at least the girl was patient, and as long as the thread of dreaming continued unbroken around her, she also was hopeful, for she was confident that Hubert was the right man, and that he would come through in the end. It took Hubert a long time—years, maybe—to realize that he was going about his experience all the wrong way. Whatever the girl and her clan were doing in their caves, they weren’t going to just hand it over to him, not as they performed or received it. Thus, though Hubert knew he resembled these people more now than he did the other astronomers back at the compound, he also knew that he wasn’t really like them, and that though his cave was cool and, in its own way, homey, if he was ever going to understand why or how he had come to be exactly here, he was going to need a more aggressive strategy, something more clearly defined than just sitting around waiting for inspiration to strike. What he needed was a system, something scientific, the way back to thinking in words.

Still, Hubert was a scientist, and he also knew that he was lacking data.

So one night, he awoke with the word in his mouth: data.

“Data,” he said, the unexpected word feeling clumsy and unfamiliar on his tongue, like fur. “Data.”

And though he fell, contented, almost immediately back to sleep, the word hung around in his cave, sounding—had there been anyone to listen—more and more like: dada.

Hubert arose the next morning determined to get to the bottom of his experience.

Hubert’s throat was sore from talking in his sleep.

“Girl,” he bellowed. Then, more softly, more like a lover, he called out, “Oh, girl.”

Hubert looked, for all intents and purposes, like a wild man.

Oh, Hubert.
That very day Hubert went out and began to explore on his own, and the girl, excited, followed behind, but as before, Hubert bumbled even this, becoming agitated by and interested in all the wrong things. He spent some time on insects, which were larger and more multi-colored than any he had ever seen, and for awhile he longed for his killing jar and the cotton-backed display cases that had lined his small childhood room.

Later, Hubert noticed plants, hidden in the cool undersides of stones, which certainly must have been what he was eating, though in their natural environment they looked so delicate and insubstantial. *How*, he wondered, *could they keep a whole, gross body alive?*

Behind him, only partially hidden by a ragged outcropping, the girl was thinking: *rocks, Hubert, rocks. Think rocks.*

But Hubert, so precocious and filled with such alacrity as a child, was going to have to do this, the girl saw now, in his own way.

One day Hubert found a lizard sunning on a rock, its blue tongue flitting in and out of its widely angled mouth. Brown and hard, Hubert looked a little like a lizard himself, and for some time—oh, a week or more—he squatted low beside it, wrapped up in a kind of inter-species communion, until finally the lizard climbed up on his knee to meet his gaze, eye to eye. Behind him, tears traced dirty trails down the girl’s cheeks. Although she did not know what this might mean, she did know that one of her uncles was passing in his cave, and that the thread of dreams was weakening all around them.

*Rocks, Hubert, rocks,* she would think.

And then one day it happened. As gently as humanly possible, Hubert put down the gray lizard he was holding, and stood up and shook his stiffness out, and looked about him, aware for the first time since arriving that the sea of rocks around him stretched for as far as he could see, and above that, only sky, and then Hubert began to explore in earnest, walking out beyond the place where the girl and her clan lived just a little bit each day, each day in a different direction, never far enough to get lost or not have time to get back before night, but always, each day, to a different
place, closer and closer—the girl began to feel hopeful again—to where she had been leading him since they first they started out, and each day she thrilled anew, each day she left her own dreaming behind, convinced that the moment on which all things depended was now very soon to be at hand.

So this is how it happens that finally and at long last Hubert discovers the origin of stars in a small stone basin in the outback of a distant continent among a sea of rocks, vast as sky itself, and with the small girl watching behind him. Naturally, Hubert gets even this wrong, initially concluding that he has at long last stumbled onto his own discovery—a bed of ancient meteorites that, in a stunning reversal of everything known about the universe itself, somehow have not gone out. And they are beautiful, pooled together in their basin, limpid constellations of otherworldly light which, even in the bright glare of day, give off a clear, pure incandescence, like something you could touch, or hold in your hand, or drink. Hubert is suddenly thirsty, but as he approaches the bed of stones, he is momentarily blinded and falls to his knees, covering his eyes, and then he is very tired, and sleeps.

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Hubert will return to this site, followed by the girl, many times before he sees, again, that he is wrong, sees that the still glowing meteorites have not fallen there, but instead, and this is something Hubert can never quite get into words but something he nonetheless knows with an astonishing certitude that leaves him breathless, originate there. This knowledge is the part of his experience that will leave him altered, and it will come to him on the day he sees a small star being launched by a young man from the girl’s clan who heaves it up into the heavens and then turns back to where his cave is and his dreams. Hubert does not need to link this extravagant discovery to the origin of everything. For Hubert, it is enough, finally, to go out into the small stone basin, to stand there in the light, to reach down and pick up an egg-shaped glowing orb, strangely luminescent closer up—almost green—and
hold it in his hands, knowing that several hundred billion years from now it will be shining down on some small boy on earth from high above and unimaginably far away.

Behind him, the girl is not smiling, but she isn’t weeping either, and the anticipation she has felt for some time now has been replaced by a feeling of such righteousness that she feels if not transported, then at least vindicated.

But no, and it’s a good thing, the girl keeps both feet planted firmly on the ground, because when Hubert stands and looks about him, holding one glowing orb in his hands, he turns at last and sees her, recognizing at once the look on her face, which is nothing so much as triumphant, nothing so much as an ultimatum, and her meaning is as clear as if they did share a common language: now will you take your telescope and other scientists and big machines, and go away, and leave the stars and the rest of the dreaming to us, to whom they most properly belong and on which you most assuredly depend.

And the look on her face breaks Hubert’s heart because, after all that she has done for him, he knows he cannot do even this one small thing for her.

Three: Hubert’s Dotage

It is true, as it is written in the accounts, that when Hubert walks out of the wild, no one believes in him at first. The largely indigenous staff sees him mainly as an apparition, and some of them leave the compound forever, while the visiting astronomers, who have only heard the story of his disappearance (and have not, some of them, believed even in that), cannot calibrate any of the available data to make it make sense. But it doesn’t really matter, because Hubert isn’t talking, not much anyway, and the few words he does say—Nikes, asparagus, rock, green—are slurred and unintelligible, as if his tongue had grown fat and clumsy with disuse.

In later years it will be difficult for students of astronomy to reconcile this image of a ragged wild man with the dapper, square-headed professor famous for his scintillating lectures on light, for Hubert had had an idea. It was not a very sound or
scientific idea, but it was an idea nonetheless that sustained him in his decline. If, Hubert reasoned, the nature of light was that the speed of it was the fastest that human beings could imagine, beyond which, everything was altered past recognition—time, space, the continuum thereof—what would happen—this was his idea—if it were somehow stopped, or even—and this thought left him breathless, for now Hubert imagined the world going backward, everything headed toward those precise moments when the most egregious mistakes had been made, back beyond even his own betrayal to, oh, something like the splitting of the atom itself—reversed?

“lt will happen,” he insisted to his students. “First, we’ll slow it down, and then one day, we’ll stop it. And then…” Hubert said, his eyes going a bit distant, the way they sometimes did, but then he never said anything more.

And while Hubert was not part of the scientific team that did eventually succeed in bringing light to a standstill, he was rumored to have taken a rare glass of champagne when it did, as he long had predicted, happen, and those who were with him shyly reported that he grew a bit teary-eyed.

Some of his students, especially the girls, were aware of his tendency toward sentiment, even grief, just below his cheery aplomb, and sometimes they brought him gifts to assuage it—cookies, star charts, and even, as his dotage approached, one hand-knitted berry-red afghan and a pair of flannel slippers that delighted him. Oh Hubert.

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It wasn’t until well into his dotage that the stars started going out. Hubert knew them all by then, by name and intergalactic location, and it was with a great feeling of sadness that he started crossing them off his charts. But of course, Hubert had been waiting his whole life for this sequence of events to begin, ever since he’d returned with a small expedition to the scene of his prior event and, finding no trace of the meteorites, the girl or her clan, understood the magnitude of his own betrayal. From that point on, he had never for an instant been free, in his mind, of the look
that the girl had given him, full of such import and foreboding, but who was he, he had frequently thought, but one sole puny man, and what could she have possibly expected him to do to circumvent the whole of Western science?

On the occasion of this one expedition, the other scientists watched uneasily as Hubert paced around and around a small stone basin, then lay down in the curve of its bottom, buffed to a luminous sheen by centuries of wind, and slept there for three straight days. When he awoke, he never again spoke publicly about stars, devoting himself, instead, to his study of light. Taciturn to the end about his motives, it is possible that Hubert’s idea was evolving inside him, for Hubert was, in some respects a pragmatist, and now it might have seemed that if reversing light and all that came before lay too far in the future for his lifetime (Hubert would never stop believing in this possibility), what was there to stop him, in the present moment, from using what was already known about the stopping of light to contain it, and then somehow to make and launch new stars—Hubert’s stars, they would come to be called?

But the girl, who sometimes came to him in dreams, only laughed. “You had your chance,” she said, as if they shared a common language, and she was holding out both hands, and one of them was empty, and in the other she was holding a small, green glowing orb.

The laughter was not unkind, but it was, nonetheless, the saddest sound Hubert had ever heard, and in his dotage it afflicted him with tinnitus, not so much a ringing but the sound of the girl laughing at him, if laughter was truly what it was. Sometimes, in his dotage he thought about his parents, heli-hiking in the Canadian Rockies.

“What a way to go,” he said. “I should,” he said, “have been a geologist instead.”

But of course, one by one, the stars were disappearing, and as Hubert—a single, sole and puny man—watched them go, he knew that in this, as in the rest of his life, he had gone about everything wrong, and though he wanted more than anything to go back and do it over, it was too late and Hubert knew it.

Already the stars were going out.
Ruth Daigon

Fusing Silence

In the province no one visits, she's still waiting to be born. I can almost feel her breath brushing by me like a dark wish.

hear the lullabies burrowed deep in time when I lay under stars small fires, waiting
under sun's spiral, waiting under vacant wash of sky beyond barriers of sight, waiting.

If I empty my head of names If I empty my pocket of coins If I empty my shoes will I feel the imprint of a palm or hear a voice that fuses silence?

In thought's last extravagance we reach toward each other intent and unaware, and I imagine fears that shape her nights until the world leaps back to brightness.

Yet, she never quite appears even in the down drop of sleep and the moment is never the moment where grace begins.

In the dream she's above me leaning into the pond. From the still, clear water I stare up mouthing her words.

As I drift on the current and beyond, she follows sinking a stone through me.
then extends her hand.
We exchange places.

Water covers her eyes, her mouth.
I inhale her and I am cold.
Peering into the blue façade
I shield my eyes.
One reflection kisses, the other kills.

She sinks through amber depths
into green awareness and then
rises to the surface
singing of a more transparent time.

Night rises like dark wine.
Under the moon's s bald eye,
we float together, the shadow
of one lying darkly on the other.
On the Brink

She knows the art of lying still,  
sleeping with the invisible in the windless  
dark and bedded warmth of night.

She knows the little hauntings, the old scenery  
waiting in the wings, the moon on a thread,  
the slow swing of the year.

She knows how to wait with the cicadas  
for seventeen summers and sing without promise  
until the white weather of dreams.

She knows childhood’s land of sticks and stones,  
fluid days, and how to lie in snowy fields  
leaving behind corpses of angels.

She knows how the old spend their days  
arranging comb, brush and last night’s  
news while moonlight seeps through windows.

She knows when the tide comes in, waves  
lapping at her feet and she  
on the brink of everything she does not know.
A Whiff of Chaos

in a caesura between now and then
she clings to the time
when looking back was sweet
a dream of open space
of nights fragrant with feathers
and a carapace of stars
instead
there are snapshots soaked in vinegar and honey
the failed revolution and days gone to scrub
the car’s lost in long term parking
her pockets flapping inside out
there's dust to water down
sheets to air
and the mirror no longer casts its spell
but
so far the sky's still there
sunlight climbs from the latest dark
as the new day hovers like surprise
and before she lies in the stone throat of sleep
she breathes scent of buds nippling from branches
of ripe mornings random as vines
or listens to the terse comments of rain,
the hovering business of hummingbirds
and marvels at the luster of lightning bugs
or a thread of spittle sparkling in a cat's yawn.

it's the best that she can do
not much
unless
it's everything
Frozen Inside the Moment

On scrubbed autumn days, nothing grows but absence. She's at the pond sighting wild geese overhead and the sun trapped in civilized ripples.

Along pond's perimeter a silence waits for winter. Slow currents prod a scum of leaves from one shore to another.

2

Frost sets in with its brittle stalks and helpings of salt hay. Winds blow in the same bare place. Winter's breath adds another layer to the year

Fixed in that perfect tense like a bird hanging midair Frozen inside the moment, she surrenders to the silent population of the snow.

3

The weather vane grinds on its swivel. Her eye blots out images of green, finding comfort in bare limbs. A snowflake resting in her palm makes of her life a crystal moment.

She's wrapped in frost-thinned moonlight and a twilight of voices humming love songs, birth songs, death songs. All the melodies she left behind return and take her into their arms.
From The River Gods

1930
Calvin Coolidge

The ringing startles me out of sleep—the persistent ringing—and then a woman's voice (from beyond the grave). I lift the coffin and listen, the smooth black receiver cradled in my trembling hand. "Mr. President, Mr. President," I hear eventually. My rocking chair stops rocking. I glance up Massasoit Street toward Elm Street, and out of the corner of my eye I note the gardener trembling. He has a fine persistent tremble, chin, hands, shoulders, but it does not interfere with his lovely work. "You were having a bad dream, sir?" he says. I nod, neck still tingling, my whole left side tingling and numb, for that matter. Mother's voice rings in my mind, but also her smell—neither present to my senses for fifty years—like a box of used souls. I see a young man edging his way down the street. Many drive or walk by the house since we returned from Washington. Mrs. Coolidge urges me to sell the duplex and move somewhere more private and fitting for an ex-President. I demur. The young man's face is vaguely familiar. He finds the courage to walk past my porch. He stops. He speaks. "I was a boy, standing at the fence outside the White House, Mr President. Your friend, a Colonel, saw me and brought me in to meet you. I could not find the voice to talk, but the Colonel spoke for me, telling you how sorry I was that you'd lost your son. It moved me to see the President cry." Calvin Coolidge, Jr. developed a blister after playing tennis on the White House courts. The blister became infected and he died of septicemia in Walter Reed Hospital, July 7, 1924. Mrs. Coolidge died many years after I did, but I noted that she did so just a few hours after the 32nd anniversary of Calvin Coolidge, Jr.'s death.
1852
The Sage of Mineral Hill

In society you will not find health, but in nature. Unless our feet at least stand in the midst of nature, all our faces will be pale and livid. Society is always diseased, and the best is the most so. I built two cabins by hand, one on the upper reach of the Connecticut River just before Hatfield, the other on the highest point of land in Northampton township, on Mineral Hill. There is no scent in nature so wholesome as that of the pines, nor any fragrance so penetrating and restorative as the life-everlasting in high pastures. I would keep some book of natural history always by me as a sort of elixir, the reading of which should restore the tone of the system. The river cabin appeals to me in May, when the waters threaten to take it downstream and me with it, and in October, the most placid time of year. To the sick, indeed, nature is sick, but to the well, a fountain of health. To him who contemplates a trait of natural beauty no harm nor disappointment can come. The spruce, the hemlock, and the pine will not countenance despair. The hill cabin calls me mid-winter, for bracing encounters with wind, ice, sleet, and only occasionally snow. I also hie there in August, to escape the heat. Methinks some creeds in vestries and churches do forget the hunter wrapped in furs by the Great Slave Lake, and that the Esquimaux sledges are drawn by dogs in the twilight of the northern night to follow the seal and walrus on the ice. Sick and diseased imaginations toll the world's knell too soon. Cannot these sedentary sects do better than prepare the shrouds and write the epitaphs of those other busy living men? Northampton below from Mineral Hill is as remote as the Northwest Passage. We live on what we find, the dog and me-service berries in June, tart strawberries, carrots that taste of metal. What is any man's discourse to me, if I am not sensible of something in it as steady and cheery as the creak of crickets? In it the woods must be relieved against the sky. Men tire me when I am not constantly greeted and refreshed as by the flux of sparkling streams. Surely joy is the condition of life. Think of the young fry that leap in ponds, the myriads of insects ushered into being on a summer evening, the incessant note of the hyla with which the woods ring in the spring, the nonchalance of the butterfly carrying accident
and change painted in a thousand hues upon its wings, or the brook minnow stoutly stemming the current, the luster of whose scales worn bright by the attrition is reflected upon the bank.

I have seen it suggested somewhere that the crow was brought to this country by the white man; but I shall as soon believe that the white man planted these pines and hemlocks. He is no spaniel to follow our steps; but rather he flits about the clearings like the dusky spirit of the Indian, reminding me of Philip and Powhatan, not Winthrop and Smith. He is a relic of the dark ages. By just so slight, by just so lasting a tenure does superstition hold the world ever; there is the rook in England, and the crow in New England.

The fishes commonly taken in our ponds are pickerel, suckers, perch, eels, pouts, breams, and shiners. In April, the snapping turtle, Emysaurus serpentina, is frequently taken on the meadows and in the river. The fisherman, taking sight over the calm surface, discovers its snout projecting above the water, at the distance of many rods, and easily secures his prey because it prefers not to disturb the water by swimming hastily away. Gradually drawing its head under, it remains resting on some limb or clump of grass. Its eggs, which are buried at a distance from the water, in some soft place, as a pigeon bed, are frequently devoured by the skunk. It will catch fish by daylight, as a toad catches flies, and is said to emit a transparent fluid from its mouth to attract them. Its grip is deathless. Two boys stole a swim in my pond one hot May forenoon, and I heard one cry out in terrible pain shortly after. A snapping turtle had taken a hold of his wrist, biting clear to the bone. The other boy chopped the head off at the long neck with a rude axe he'd brought along with him. To my anger, he said he'd thrown the body into the pond's deep—it is excellent meat! The dead head and jaw of the beast would not give up the fight. I brought a thin saw from the cabin that I use for saplings to make arrows. The saw ruined itself on this task—cutting through the jaw bone—but the boy was grateful if faint. I wrapped his wrist in birch bark, which I keep soft, soaking a quantity in a quiet inlet of the pond. His left hand would not be long for this world. I asked if he was dexterous or sinister, and his friend replied the latter, a well-educated trespasser. With pity for the soon-to-be
lack-handed lefthander, I escorted the two of them to town. My house and family are on Massasoit Street, but I did not wish to frighten them-they find my wild looks after these sojourns trouble enough. Doctor Williams, on Elm Street, took the boy in, sent a son running off to the parents, did the amputation quickly, with whisky all around. Forgive a man his philosophies, even if they fly in the face of a civilized boy's whole parts.
Jonathan Edwards rose between four and five each morning, and he spent thirteen hours a day in study. His usual diversion was riding horseback, and he decided before leaving home what should be the subject of his thought. He would pin a piece of paper to his coat and charge his mind to associate what he had written on the paper. He repeated the process with a second paper and a second train of thought, sometimes returning from his ride with many such papers. After the ride, he took the papers from his coat in regular order, and he wrote down the line of thought and the conclusion that each had suggested. Absorbed in meditation, he was usually oblivious of all else around him. This day, with many papers attached to his summer coat pertaining to a recent unorganized awakening in the Valley, he came upon a naked white woman on the trail to Hatfield, adjacent to the Connecticut River. Edwards did not recognize her from any of the nearby congregations. She had one hand buried in the orifice out of which children were birthed. She screamed violently, especially when he touched ground near her. Edwards saw from her bright red belly that she was in some kind of devilish labor, the end of which would be death, not a child. He pulled her hand out, bloody. He held this red hand against his white shirt and for a moment her screams abated. A beatific look loosened her facial muscles. She spoke a word, "Clean," which the Pastor had to agree with. Then her stomach clenched, and in a terrible spasm a purple monstrosity fell from her belly. It seemed, for a moment, alive. The Pastor discerned eyes—not two but three, many fingers more than ten, a sort of head, but no torso, no legs, no mouth or nose. The thing momentarily held a shape but soon dissolved on the pine needles. Jonathan Edwards held the girl's hand firmly, although he felt his own legs and bowels twitch in an awful way. He soiled himself, and sobs rose out of his lungs. The girl said, "Touch me, God almighty, touch me." Edwards knew not how to interpret these words, but his other hand reached involuntarily for her belly, still ruby red but slack now, and he rubbed it. She sighed so loudly that nearby leaves moved as if from a breeze. This was her soul departing. Her head fell backwards, and black bile spilled out of her sweet
mouth. Jonathan Edwards stood up with the girl in his arms, gently lay her across his horse's saddle, and walked with them back to town. He pulled the papers from his coat and put them in his pocket. He did not want to remember what he had set his mind to consider this day. Another set of images had impressed themselves on his soul.
Gautam Verma

Balthus: *Nude in Profile, 1973*

And it was almost a girl who, stepping from this single harmony of song and lyre, appeared to me through her diaphanous form
— Rainer Maria Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus I, 2*

luminous
lit from within
translucence of skin

this torturous
surface
you cannot touch
you cannot take
your eyes
from

limned and liminal

(something’s given
something withdrawn

poised there posed
and composed

(line through
her back firm
to bare feet
on the floor)

the towel she holds

before her of an O
indescribable color

an offering or
a question

*a girl,
almost*
The Arrest, or how they appear to us...

from photographs, this:
our wedding day (37 years they’ve spent sloughing theirs off) late afternoon and the successions of smiles given way to an almost non-face
tired too but smooth indescribable

(wrinkle-free at their age!)
to where (with what thoughts) have they withdrawn
to be held in place (was ever this once even) - here - no more

the arrested gaze

without rejoinder

and times

quite impossible to bead words on the string
to knot the string round the neck of the page

and so I saw them caught between two worlds

simultaneously inactual and in-actuality waiting to die and already dead

(The air of a face is indescribable—Roland Barthes)
James Grinwis

Painting Breath

Nothing’s as it’s supposed to be.  
Today the sky was an onion.

The character is a painter  
who has never landed a single exhibition  
though his paintings number the thousands.  
They exist, all of them,

like this painting, “Breath.”  
A train’s stuck in a tunnel,  
and a boy with a flashlight shines the light  
on the face of a madwoman  
plastered to a star glued to a stone.  
The boy’s light makes the woman  
as the woman defines the light,  
and the star shifts balance so three legs dangle out.

If I went skating through a tunnel on such a night,  
I would find inside a spear piercing a shark.  
A majestic princess on a horse with a star on her helmet  
and a head the size of a mountain laurel  
would wield the spear. A speck in the paint  
I would be; a millimeter of paint  
in the flashlight-gleam of a boy  
searching for hope on a train.

The painting, she thought, had little  
to redeem itself.  
I thought it was breath.

Across the ceiling, like wandering breath,  
thousands of tiny feet.
Rabid Cows

Their noses and eyes
seem to need tightening.
They have the looks of those
who put their dreams before everything.
This, and how hard it is
to maintain luminous relationships.
On the other end of the building
are those who don’t laugh anymore.
A deflation of drive, so to speak.
A rodent with an ironing board
scurried upstairs. We get through
somehow. Paper bags pop open.
A baseball that had disappeared
flew through the atmosphere again.
Before I left, I held my wife
one last time. Her body was a strip
of lightning and my arms were the sea,
so skewed things had become. The stranger
walked down the grey road.
His shadow disappeared like a stilt.
When the volcano burst,
fifteen thousand tons of popcorn per second
gushed out. Engulfed in butter
and grief was the land. I become a disciple
of surfaces, which leads to distrust.
Once, I was no longer an individual
but a unit of time. A pedestrian
smiled. The bears crept quietly from
very small dens. So many dens
on the edge of town. Losing oneself:
like stumbling home.
“Well, I guess I won’t be needing my academic training now,” Meira murmured as she quickly undressed and pounced hungrily onto his body. Again he was amazed; the directness of the women he met in Jerusalem stunned him. He wondered if someone had spread the word that a naïve country boy had come up to the city. She took full license with his body, doing things with it he would never dare ask his wife to do. He shuddered at even hinting his secret desires, they seemed so depraved to him. But with the inflamed Meira, even during intercourse there was no hint of indecency. She did what she did with his body with seriousness, concentration and with not a trace of humor. He was surprised at the depth of the modesty he sensed beneath the passion of her sex. She froze for a moment when, in the heat of the act he let slip aloud some dirty words. “No, she didn't like that,” he recalled and did not forget it. He tried not to anger her needlessly.

She threw her clothes on the chair, shivering in the fall air that drifted through the window. Again he saw in the dim light of a transparent, desire-arousing October evening, the nunnish simplicity of her dress. Her panties and bra were the cut and color of a uniform, not intimate wear. Her skin was soft and different from his wife’s. His hands smoothed along the tiny bumps down her back and above the rise of her cunt. Her legs surprised him; young legs, skin firm and fair, shaped like a teenager’s. It was as if her body was made up of parts from several different women. Looking at her, he did not hold back praise for her lovely legs. Long after that night she remembered his simple words that touched her heart. Her breasts that had not yet suckled, excited him, her firm stomach and narrow cunt, too, as if he was coming on a girl, like so many years ago. He was happy to make love under an open window and inhale deeply the
cool night wind. He had not known air like this, oxygen-filled, clean, stimulating, in his village in the far away lowlands. He put off his pressing questions about her life for another night, a while later, when their first hunger relaxed its hold. Surrounded by her body and her loving, he couldn’t imagine why she was still unmarried. Was she divorced? Why was there no sign of children in her apartment? What did her good friends really know about her life?

After a light doze, they awoke and he kissed her. She joined her mouth to his and pressed her teeth into it. With his lips and tongue, he felt the metal plate of her dental bridge; its point pierced him and he bit his tongue. Suddenly the pain threw him back to a distant, foreign city, unfamiliar to him except in his dreams. There, in that far off city, he was making love with a woman who appeared lifeless, and for a short moment it seemed to him he was exchanging kisses and pressing into the mouth and jaw of a bare skull.

Without intending to, he moved himself out from under Meira’s hot belly, out of the little room in which they were lying, outside of her Jerusalem apartment, out of the emotional tangle curled inside him before he had time to regret. He told himself he was feeling one of the 60 final retributions—exactly what happens to anyone who sins in an adulterous bed. There were punishments worse than these, stabbing, wounding, hurting, that come swooping down upon you just in the middle of perfect physical pleasure. They were sure signs, impossible to mistake, rushing in just at that soft and pleasant time when the body must not feel any pain, when the soul must rest. These retributions were reserved for him thirty years hence, but he was getting them in advance for the turbulent love affair into which he had fallen.

Yes, one caught in a frenzy like him, gets his due early. He is given to feel what horrible punishment awaits him at the end of the path of pleasures, so he will not err nor forget for even one night from where he comes, where he is rushing to, and what he will suffer when he gets there.

He did not calm down from what was revealed to him during their couplings and between them that night. He was not satisfied with the intensity and the suddenness of his relationship with Meira Hecht. Maybe he would get used to all this.
at some point. But in the meantime, he already felt pangs of conscience. Pains of regret already assailed him. He recalled what one of his soldier friends said to him once during long months of service in the detested Golan, “You highbrows, we know you. You screw and cry.” Why were those inane words pecking at him tonight?

Under the modest skin of a wandering lecturer, a woman hungry for his body was revealed. While still in her bed he was terrified to think of the pleasure that had fallen into his lap. How would he cope with his overfull portion, how could he get square with these nibbles of life’s delights that he had once forbidden himself, these nibbles that had already given him a first warning. If he did not mend his ways they would hurt him. He would stop immediately, or at the latest, tomorrow, extract himself from the barren connection created between them. Surely she was also warned by her hidden faith; she must also have boundaries she was forbidden to cross. He suspected her, but he had no proof! Despite her freedom as an independent woman who supported herself with honor, was she dedicated to some secret worship in one of those strange groups that had sprung up in Jerusalem after the terrible breach of the Yom Kippur War? Wasn’t there someone to stop her? He must stop; she must stop; they must desist together from the madness that clutched them. It was impossible they should enjoy so much and not be punished. It was impossible they should cause so much injustice to people dependent on them and not get their just desserts! This was flagrant insolence. Through the window open to the cool fall, he felt himself a debtor warned, whose day of reckoning would come.

He did not deny that he had a family on the kibbutz. “Yes, a wife and two children that I love very much.” He especially often mentioned his little son who clenched his heart. During all the months he spent in the Syrian front and beyond the mountains of darkness, the longing for his little boy strengthened his spirit and filled him with hope. Because of this child he was also filled with strong fears that clutched him amid the shelling. A boy like that was worth coming back to safely from the war. When he helped bring the wounded to the bombed gatations, he heard the older wounded men murmuring blessings and pledges. They wished eternal life and health to their little children who remained after them. Some took out of their scorched
clothes remnants of burnt wallets with bits of singed photos. But he told himself that he would come back to his little boy no matter what. No power in the world would stop him. He would cross the smoking basalt fields and return to his little village. He would elude the stray bullets, delayed shells, ambushes and accidents, because his little boy was waiting for him, because he promised him he’d come back, because he had not yet finished his mission.

He really did have readjustment problems when he came back from the war. The ties with his older girl had weakened and it was urgently necessary to strengthen them. With his wife he celebrated a brief Spring of renewed love, immediately after the battles, a kind of rediscovery of each other, a security in affirming the true connection between them. "It’s a fact; despite his rather long stint under fire, he came back.” He had survived stubbornly and come back, as if all he had done in his life until now was desirable and acceptable, undeserving of any punishment. The horrors of war justified their love. But inside himself, back then he already felt that this was only an external facade of the soul. In truth, deep within him, everything had changed since the battles. He knew that if he did little sinning, it was only for lack of opportunities. The pervasive nihilistic spirit that the war had brought did not pass over him because for his part, he very much craved lots of sinning of all kinds. He wanted to kick at every framework he had believed in before the war.

He would be an artist, free and sinful. He would free himself from the cables of provincial morality. But he also feared, lest he lose his immunity if he sinned too much, and would revert to being punishable like he was before being in the battlefield. But until this pleasant hour, under the refreshing window of Meira Hecht, and between her smoldering sheets, he had not yet been punished.

In his visions, especially frequent on his long journeys, his life flowed along a different course, in his wild dreams surged his other life. In his writing that he had sunk into since the war, emerged a hidden life that frightened him. There among the pages, he castigated himself with various punishments, some deserved and some exaggerated, some altogether undeserved.
Once, a young woman who read a few of his war poems remarked to him: “It is touching how you want to change places with them, but you couldn’t be burnt instead of them and write the poem; you couldn’t be wounded instead of them nor remain there under the darkening waves; and it’s good that you made them a memorial and set up a monument to them. It’s good that you carved something positive from the bad basalt. Through you and your war poems, maybe they will continue living with us many years more.”

Meira did not question him about his family, only here and there made a remark implying that she wondered why a fellow like him, long married like him, was still deliberating over elementary questions. What kind of a country bumpkin was he—clumsy in body, gauche in thought and disturbed by banal pangs of conscience? But in bed she was free and encouraged him to take her body any way he wanted. They had a kind of treaty of silence between them; she did not ask any more about his family and he did not question her about her former life, although always, there were the same unanswered questions—Who was she with before him? Had she ever been married? Why was there no trace of a child in her small apartment?

The Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles) was already past and the long holiday vacation ended. The hubbub of serious study went on around him, teachers came and went, afternoon lectures were held in the dorm and in the evening too he was urged to attend enrichment courses. Every day he found in his office mailbox numerous invitations to events on campus and in the city. He got a generous stipend to buy basic books in Judaism from the director of the seminary, he spent long days roaming among the little book stores in the northern neighborhoods. He scraped the narrow streets and learned through his feet the dark land of the ultra-religious. His sandal soles wore out and the dry Jerusalem air to which he was not accustomed cracked the skin of his heels. When he started walking in the morning, he limped from pain until his feet got used to the city’s dry, chilly air. The burning cracks of his feet’s skin reminded him constantly that he was not at home, was not eating at his own table and not sleeping in his own bed.
Meira smeared a soothing cream on his damaged skin as dexterously and pleasantly as if she were a merciful army nurse. “Nice,” he said to her, “so you did learn something in the army.” One hurt was treated, but what about the others? She surprised him by her practical sense when she whispered in his ear, “It’s alright, you can let go within me; I’ve already taken precaution.” He was moved by her frankness and by the dry way she found to relieve him. He always thought that preventing unwanted pregnancies was the concern of the woman lying under him and he fell upon her again and again. The last thing he needed was for her to get herself pregnant suddenly at the end of Fall. From her words, he learned there had been failures too and he supposed that once or twice previously when she was younger, she had been compelled to go through the humiliation of having an abortion. He urged her to tell him, because he too had harsh memories of the days when his wife had to abort their baby, but she was restrained and not eager to disclose such intimate secrets; she also guessed that their relationship would not last long. In whose ears was she entrusting such protected and private secrets? Who was he, after all? A hulky farmer who didn’t even know his way around the campus paths? She clammed up and wouldn’t go on; he tried to learn from what she concealed. So he learned to listen to her silences and found she gave evidence of an unsolved secret, greatly arousing his curiosity.

In those days, he happened into a narrow, stuffy office in the ultra-religious neighborhood of Upper Romema. He knew he had religious relatives in Jerusalem and wanted through them to find out more details about his grandmother and grandfather who had died in Poland. From the office they sent him to the family’s home. He was very disappointed with the meeting. He met reserved people, with a pronounced American accent who regarded him as the real stranger in the country. He, and not them, whose whole being shouted Diaspora, was the foreigner: secular and a farmer, from a distant kibbutz, one who published obscure elegiac poems in newspapers to boot. He looked strange to them. They clearly disapproved of him despite the familial cordiality they displayed toward him. The father of the family pattered in his ears trite commentaries on Scripture from the weekly reading and boasted of new
acquisitions of back-to-religion celebrities from the Tel Aviv bohemia. The long, hard war had passed over their shoulders and not touched them a bit. They even had the nerve to wonder how come a big fellow like himself could not get over the prolonged shock.

Walking downhill through the neighborhood from their home, he asked himself if all these were living in the same country? If all these belonged to the same people? If they all shared a common fate?

The stories they told him in brief about his grandfather’s home in a destroyed town in Poland were edited and censored in the spirit of the Jewish traditional, and they had no documents of interest. He had the feeling that they simply exchanged the Polish Exile for the Exile of Brooklyn, then that for the Exile of Upper Romema. They often mentioned “the Book”, a manuscript full of Scripture interpretations, awesome and deep, that his grandfather wrote during the hard nights of the First World War. But when he asked to glance into “the Book”, of course they did not have it. In the family there was talk of a generous donation gathered with great difficulty, and of an anonymous rich American who was determined to publish it after 70 years despite all intervening events, here, in our Holy Land, in the Holy city being rebuilt, in one of the crowded printing shops of the ultra-religious neighborhood, thousands of years and thousands of kilometers away from the swamplands of the Polish border region.

One fresh Fall morning, leaving Meira’s home surfeited with sex and weary from love, he leapt heavily up the steps leading to the campus, and for a moment deluded himself that he was a young ram full of desire. Had the rutting ewes chanced by on his path and stood meekly before him, he would have jumped on them all with pleasure. He would not have skipped even one. He asked himself what was further from him now? The tranquil citrus groves of his sleepy village? The tumbled-down fences of the crowded religious neighborhood of Upper Romema? The bridge pillars in Brooklyn Bay?

His eyes blurred from the radiance of the clear morning. A dull pain ran through his exhausted loins. A kind of pleasant drunkenness gripped his throat. He was a bit groggy, and surprised to hear the crows croaking wildly in the tangle of
hedges along the street. Then, just as in his youth, when he was suddenly filled with unexpected happiness, he longed to cry.
Postcard

Left from Tbilisi today - took a minibus - the road back was spectacular - slowly moving southward to Yerevan. The corporate buildings have no grace here - they turn into chains of naked mountains - each crowned with a church. Meadows of the red, of the yellow, of the violet flowers hand-sewn on a bishop’s regalia - endless fields of golden wheat. Scenery changes in a blink - highways become narrow and unpredictable, *serpentine* is the word - and the need to completely trust the driver is intoxicating. Cemeteries - scattered on the edge of the road - old and new, with ornamental cross-stones and pictures of the dead, irises - metastasized around the graves - all well taken care of - and yet there is no sign of any locals or villages nearby. Indeed - we are a funerary society.
Life of God

He cried, it rained. He shook
his rattle, thunder echoed
throughout the void. He shat upon
himself, cherubs flitted about
like flies, zealous to change
his sacrosanct diaper, safety
pins pursed on pious
lips. In school, He made friends
readily—out of Popsicle sticks, elbow
macaroni & plenty
of Elmer’s. For His science
project—while Buddha fussed
over a Styrofoam
solar system & Vishnu
ate paste—the Almighty showed off
His awe-inspiring, infinite,
fully functional, complete
with flickering lights & soiled humanity,

universe. Lousy
at sports, He counted on angels, rough
& tumble, blackened feathers
flying, to smite the mocking
jocks yoked in the ritual
of pantsing & dragging
His pimply, omnipotent ass
around heaven’s high school track. He aced
the LSATs, raced through
His J.D., resisted
the devilish temptation of politics, opting
instead for a position with Fidelity
Life, where He rose faster
than Jesus. Married,
He bought a bungalow, mortgaged
beyond redemption, in the burbs, engaged once or twice in extramarital hoo-hahs, divorced, remarried, begat 2.5 billion children, who, spawned in his image, disappointed

him in His dotage. He tossed off sacramental wine like water, the stubby black stogy of lost glory clenched between sin-stained partials. *Is this how you want to go?* Mrs. God ragged over supper, His wizened face slumped in a cold bowl of something, & sure enough.
Jay Baruch

Road Test

People jump wide of the vomit on the ER floor. “Ugh” someone yelps, others shield their eyes. Morris wants a closer look. He pulls on the black‐framed bifocals that hang from his gobble neck, leans on his mop, crouches low until his knees crackle. He’s certain now: snow peas and baby shrimp. He glowers at the Intern, who’s complaining to a nurse. “Clyde did this,” says the Intern, pointing to the homeless drunk snoring on a rusty stretcher nearby, in a cubicle where no one has bothered to draw the curtain. “It’s too good a meal,” Morris announces, shaking his head. “This is yuppie puke.” Morris knows he sounds overly serious, like a salty detective, but Clyde is an ER frequent flyer who prefers alcohol to shellfish.

The Intern’s lips tighten against his white teeth. “And you are?” he asks.

Morris’s pushes himself upright, achingly, making the most of his 5 feet 8 inches. He spreads his arms, draws attention to his gray uniform. “I’m the night shift janitor.”

“Ahh,” says the Intern, as if nothing more needed to be stated.

Head down, Morris diligently mops up the mess, regret in his strokes as the evidence vanishes. Once finished, he stacks bricks of new paper towels in his once muscular arms and makes the rounds restocking dispensers. Morris roams the ER freely, his presence both obvious and invisible, like the walls. Occasionally, someone says “hi” with a bemused grin, or “what’s up” and doesn’t wait for the answer. Not one “welcome back,” though. His wife Tess had recently died. This evening is his first shift as a widower.

Because he considered Tess his counterweight, his life has now taken on a steep tilt. She worked as a school librarian. She believed children were containers of promise and hope, and she took her responsibility to inspire them very seriously.
When she read Dr. Seuss the kids sat star struck, cross-legged and barely breathing; she looked deeply into each set of eyes, not having to read the words because they were engrained in her head. When the doctors described the infecting bacteria as resistant to the many antibiotics they’d tried, she was stronger than he. She responded in a weak whisper. “Resistant? Like hippies?” She winked at Morris. “In my lungs/in my pee/ in my blood/ they won’t let me be.”

From the sink across from Clyde’s stretcher, Morris watches him sleep. Privacy is an illusion in the ER, Morris thinks guiltily, aware of what he’s doing. He tugs on the curtain to close it. The overhead track rattles when he does, and Clyde snaps awake.

“Who’s there?” Clyde growls, hugging a plastic Gap bag stuffed with his belongings. Morris jumps away. Clyde throws off the thin white sheet. His dark hound-dog eyes bulge. His jeans are soaked with piss. His fingers lap the blotch from his crotch and inner thigh. Their eyes lock. “Who did this?” Clyde screams. People wearing scrubs and white coats pass by. They shoot him a glance but don’t stop.

The Intern rushes over. “What now, Clyde?” he asks.

“Nothing,” says Clyde, scrambling back under the white sheet. Outside, a snowstorm rages. Clyde wants to stay the night, to be forgotten until morning.

The Intern finds Clyde’s wrist and counts his pulse. “You’re looking better.”

“I’m beyond better,” Clyde says, nervously picking at a scab on his sun-burnt nose. “I’m in withdrawal.”

The Intern shines a penlight into Clyde’s darting eyes. “You’re still drunk. How can you be in withdrawal?”

“Not drunk enough,” says Clyde, proudly.

The Intern raises Clyde’s dirt-creased hands, palms down, and contemplates the tremors. Morris shakes his head. Even he knows to check for tongue fasciculations. They can’t be faked as easily as tremulous hands.

The Intern scans the ER. Patients on stretchers hug both sides of the hallway; friends and family, nervous and petulant, stiffly stand guard. “I’ll give you something to calm you down,” he tells Clyde, “and check on you in a few hours.”
Clyde sighs, nestles beneath the sheet. Morris slams the towel dispenser closed, smirking, impressed with Clyde’s performance. Clyde could also roll his eyes high into his head so it appeared his sockets were filled with ping-pong balls. This singular talent always earned him an ambulance ride to the ER during bitter New York winters.

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The sharps box is overstuffed. A nest of bloody needles block the narrow mouth from sliding closed. Morris cringes. The sharps box is a hard plastic container that should never be filled beyond the three-quarter mark. Needles, scalpels, and syringes are disposed there so others don’t get accidentally pricked and possibly infected. Morris dreads this task ever since Tess fell ill. He suspects he may have carried the infection home with him, acquired perhaps from chores such as this one; no one believes a healthy fifty year old woman contracted outlaw microbes from*The Cat in the Hat.*

Clyde calls Morris in a raspy whisper. “Where have you been? I missed you.”

This saddens Morris. Only Clyde had noticed that he’s been gone for four weeks.

“Morris?” Clyde calls louder. “Snake me a meal.”

“Not now,” he says, pinching each needle and dropping it to the bottom of an empty sharps box at his feet. IV needles, butterfly needles, thread-thin insulin needles.

“C’mon. Morris.”

“Damn!” Morris curses under his breath. He rips off the glove, rubs his palm.

“Careful!” warns Clyde. “There’s nasty shit in those needles.”

Morris examines the skin. No puncture marks, no blood; only shell-hard calluses. His pale blue eyes glass over. He squeezes his hands into new latex gloves. Double gloving doesn’t stop the memories from flooding his head. “How is it that I’m not sick?” Morris had asked the infectious disease doctor. The stern woman removed
her round eyeglasses, rubbed tired eyes that had been mournfully focused onto Tess, by now comatose, supported by a ventilator. “Consider yourself lucky.”

Where is this luck? Morris asks himself. He hopes Tess will somehow drop clues for him. In case she does, Morris wants to make certain she’ll find him. He follows the same routine as when she was alive. He walks to work through Washington Square Park. He stops at Kievs on the way home, orders barley soup and picks up the Daily News. He fills the coffee maker with Maxwell House, Tess’s favorite, as if she’s still asleep in their bed, waiting to be waked with a kiss, the beginning of her day marking the end of his. Be grateful that you’re alive, Morris tells himself. But he feels far from lucky. He transfers enough needles so the lid can be securely closed, the infectious threat locked away, and with a pang of jealously watches how easily Clyde drifts back to sleep.

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Morris trudges about refilling each liquid soap dispenser. Strangely, the gallon jug feels heavier after each stop. His body tells him it must be getting late. He catches the Intern nudging Clyde awake. “It’s 4a.m., time for your road test.”

Morris stops what he’s doing. He wants to watch. The “road test” involves walking the crowded hallway without stumbling. Hardened alcoholics require a measure of alcohol in their bodies to idle smoothly. Sometimes when the level in their blood drops to what the law considers safe, they’ll shake and sweat and go into withdrawal, which can lead to DTs and death. Knowing when to discharge these patients requires keen and delicate judgment. You don’t want them completely sober, only sober enough. If the slurred speech improves, if they can walk steadily and confidently, they’re considered ready to leave the ER and negotiate the two blocks to the liquor store.

“How about breakfast?” Clyde asks.
The Intern scratches his golden hair. It looks stylish even mussed up. “Let’s go.” Morris moves from sink to sink. The Intern stops him, asks if he’ll speak with Clyde.

“I’m only a janitor, remember,” Morris answers acidly. “Get someone else.”

“But it seems you’re friends.”

“What makes you think that?” asks Morris, continuing his work.

“I’ve seen you talking.”

“You consider everyone you talk to a friend?” Morris asks, noticing that Clyde was looking towards them, a quizzical expression on his puffed, rounded face.

“He won’t leave unless I give him breakfast.”

“Then feed him.”

The Intern breathes fast. “There’s nothing wrong with him. He’s abusing the ER.”

Morris hands the Intern a paper towel, gestures for him to wipe the sweat dotting his forehead. “I don’t see abuse. The ER doesn’t look black and blue to me.”

“I don’t want to feed him. It will encourage him to come back.”

Morris slips his bifocals to the tip of his nose, takes a hard look at the Intern’s face, shakes his head. He gave the same disapproving look to his daughter. She screamed at him for letting the doctors kill Tess, though there was nothing more the doctors could do. “Stop torturing her,” he finally told them. “She wouldn’t have wanted this.” Now, while the Intern contemplates strategy, appearing as wounded and perplexed as his daughter did, Morris slips Clyde a cheese sandwich, on the sly, like a Washington Square Park drug dealer, then begins emptying trash baskets.

Clyde still refuses to get off the stretcher. The Intern, now indignant, hoists him upright. Clyde lunges for the sheet but the Intern yanks him forward. He notices Morris looking on. “Don’t just stand there,” he says. Clyde’s wide eyes scream the same thing.

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Morris and the Intern escort Clyde down the busy hallway, arm and arm, through a tunnel of whispers and stares. The urine has fermented for a few hours. People aggressively pinch their noses. Clyde shuffles his feet, knees crossed, head slung low. “Let me go,” he says out the corner of his cracked lips.

“Keep moving,” warns the Intern.

“Morris?” Clyde hisses.

Morris’ tight hold on Clyde slows the procession. For years he’s observed this ritual, but he’s unprepared for the wall of eyes, the torch stares, the shame. The walk is a ruse, he realizes. It doesn’t test whether patients are sober enough to leave the ER. It’s a parting dose of humiliation to deter them from coming back. He squeezes Clyde’s arm. It’s unclear who needs holding up. He did the same to the doctor who asked if Tess would have wanted “aggressive measures.” What did he know? She rescued ladybugs that wandered in from their fire escape garden, gave pesky flies an open window and not a swap with a rolled magazine. Clyde is silent; the only sounds the shush, shush of duct tape reinforcing sock heals. Blown light bulbs darken the furthest end of the hallway. They make a hairpin turn, pass through the hars, whispering crowd one more time.

“Good job,” the Intern declares buoyantly. “You’re ready to fly solo.”

Clyde breaks away, rushes to his stretcher, shuts the curtain. When he reappears, the white sheet is swathed around his waist. Holding his bag, Clyde walks slightly bent towards the Exit sign. The glass doors part. Morris watches Clyde get swallowed by tongues of swirling snow.

“He’ll freeze,” Morris tells the Intern, who gives him a dismissive look.

“It’s an ER, not a bed and breakfast,” says the Intern.

Morris listens to doctors talk about exciting cases, the “great saves.” But caring for Clyde didn’t make them feel good. The doctors said letting Tess die was the right move. But they were stumped, frustrated, and perhaps relieved to finally see her go. Morris gets his mop, wheels over the bucket, starts cleaning around Morris’ abandoned stretcher. He finds a puddle of urine.

“Who did this?” asks Morris. He waits for a response. Nothing.
An hour later, the medics wheel Clyde back into the ER. He sits high in the stretcher, beaming. “You liquored up already?” the Intern asks.

Clyde blows a laugh. “I’m back for breakfast.”

“No food. Forget it.” He waves Morris over. “Make Clyde disappear.”

“Do it yourself. Get your own hands dirty.”

To Morris’ surprise, the Intern abruptly steers Clyde to a spot just to the side of the sliding glass doors, as if being left curbside, free for anyone who wanted him. Morris watches Clyde lay his pink, wind-chilled cheeks against the pockmarked wall.

He walks over, mop in hand. He looks around. When certain no one is watching he cuffs Clyde across the back of the head.

“What the hell?” says Clyde, one eyebrow arching.

“You pissed on the floor. Like a dog.”

“You helped that kid walk me like a dog,” he snaps.

Morris swallows hard. “You pissed on my floor,” he says, “You pissed on me.”

Clyde stutters, then stops and lowers his eyes. He appears repentant, beyond despair. “I pissed my pants, Morris. I’m a fuckin’ grown man and I pissed my pants.” Clyde rifles through his bag. “Oban,” he says to Morris, “Fifty bucks a bottle. Take it.”

Morris turns the bottle upside down. Empty. But the idea of scotch warms his chest. He relaxes enough to recognize how complicated his loneliness is. The decision to let her die won’t go away. He doubts himself constantly, not the decision, but the reasoning behind it. Was he really looking out for Tess, or was it a self-conscious attempt to impress the doctors, show them that he was an educated man capable of making life and death decisions? It’s strange, but part of him doesn’t want to find a solution to this question. Not in the immediate future anyway. The doubt torments him, but contemplating that doubt keeps Tess in his life.
Morris can’t confess this to Clyde, a homeless drunk he barely knows. He returns the bottle of Oban. “Put it back in your bag,” he tells Clyde. “You’ll need it.” Clyde wearily straddles the stretcher rails, jumps down. Silvery ice-crystals crust the crotch of his jeans. The stench is gone. “I’m leaving,” Clyde yells to the Intern, loud so everyone could hear it. “You didn’t make me any better.”

The Intern strides towards them, face engorged. “You don’t want to get better,” he cries. He bites his lip, rubs his temples. “I don’t have the energy to play this game.”

Clyde’s face explodes. “Game?” He points outside. Kamikaze snowflakes slam into the glass doors to the ER. “What game?”

“You pretend you’re sick. I pretend I can help you.” The Intern is breathing quickly now. He curses himself, turns, and with shoulders slumped, walks away.

“Hey Intern,” Morris calls after him, aware that he doesn’t know the young man’s name. “Stop,” Morris says.

The Intern spins around. “My shift is over. He’s not my problem anymore.”

“Go, I don’t need you,” Clyde screams, waving the empty Oban bottle.

This job is crazy, Morris thinks. But he was offered early retirement and refused it. He knew he’d probably be here anyway, one of those lonely, nervous patients who decide 3 a.m. is the perfect time to have the decade-old mole on their back examined.

Morris reaches for his mop. Clyde snatches his wrist, grafts their bones. “You back tonight?”

Morris yanks himself free. “I need to finish up, Clyde. It’s time to go home.”
Possessive Pronominal Adjective

There are two brown spots on either side of the walkway from the house to my studio. Correction: there won’t be two brown spots on either side of the walkway from the house to my studio. Correction: there won’t be two brown spots, one on either side of the walkway from the house to my studio. Correction: there won’t be two brown spots in the lawn, one on either side of the walkway from the house to my studio. Correction: there won’t be two brown spots in the lawn where the dogs lay, one on either side of the walkway from the house to my studio. Correction: there won’t be two brown spots in the lawn where the dogs lay, one on either side of the overgrown walkway from the house to my studio. Correction: there won’t be two brown spots in the lawn where the dogs lay, one on either side of the overgrown walkway from the house to our studio. While I am in the studio making these corrections, my husband is out on the lawn fixing the sprinkler heads that one of the dogs bit off during its long days in the yard between the house and our studio. If I don’t use its, someone may think that my husband has taken to biting off sprinkler heads. He’s not there yet.
Bookkeepers

1. The first bookkeeper didn't want to be one. Sometimes we found her walking around the office in her bare feet. The first time, she said the bottoms of her feet were sunburned. After that we didn’t bring it up. What she wanted to be was a belly dancer. Once we hired her and her group for a public relations event, and it was true, she wanted to be a belly dancer.

2. The second bookkeeper had a very floral hand that she had developed growing up somewhere in the Middle East. For years after she left, we recognized her files and work sheets by her handwriting, and we would say, "That is her handwriting."

3. The third bookkeeper was young and dishonest. We checked our phone bills and found his family’s out-of-state phone number listed often enough. When we called them they gave us their address without any problem. Then they got the letter accusing their son of pocketing sums of cash meant for deposit. They sent a lawyer the next day to settle up. We don't know if the son learned any lesson, but we got our money back.

4. The fourth bookkeeper was an American Indian. We didn't want to believe that she used the petty cash to repair her car, but she put the repair receipts right in the petty cash envelopes, so there was no question. The state employment department said we could even press charges. We felt sad about that whole history stuff, so we didn't.

5. We liked the fifth bookkeeper. On the boss’s birthday, she and one of the other women ordered a stripper dressed as a cop, then she covered her eyes because she couldn’t watch. Other than that, for five years, she just kept the books.
If you pressed me, I’d tell you it was how they handled my father’s death that did it. I don’t feel like I’m one of those people who become oversensitive about this usually prickly issue, but I’m, you know, human. My father had a long and protracted illness, and his passing away was its unavoidable result. It happens; I knew it was coming. Still, he was my father, and he did die.

I suppose I felt the way most people feel about these things—deflated, defeated, depressed. To make matters worse he was up in Pittsburgh, and I told them—them being CMS, the software company I worked for at the time—that I have to take some leave to be with my family, attend the funeral, you know, all the usual maneuverings that surround the death of a close family member, especially a parent. Their response? “You get one day off. See you first thing on Wednesday.” This happened on a Monday.

Some sympathy. I nearly lost it right then and there. ‘Lost it’ not meaning crying. ‘Lost it’ meaning taking out a couple mid-level executives before I went up there to Pittsburgh for whatever fucking time I needed, since priorities are priorities. I’ll never forget. I was in Jack Plummer’s office. Big V.P. The direct management guy over most of us. Lots of expensive tropical plants in his office, the kind that gave the janitorial staff nightmares. The kind of man who wears hair gel so thick he constantly looks as if he just stepped out of a car wash n’ wax. Thin, parched smile was all you’d get from him. If that. So this guy looks me right in the eye and says: “I don’t think we can afford to do without you, Elliot. I mean take a day. Fine. That’s not going to kill us. But we need you back here. Sales are too brisk right now, buddy. You know how things are.”
I was so livid I could barely see straight, much less speak in coherent sentences. I had to lean on his desk for support. To prepare myself.

“Jack,” I said.

“Yeah buddy, you’re talking to him.”

“My father just died here. Got me. This isn’t some ex-roommate in college who’s getting married in the Hamptons. This isn’t a family reunion. This is an emergency situation I’m talking about.”

“Hey Elliot,” he said. “You should know that all of CMS feels your loss. We do. We’re right behind you in spirit and all. But what I mean is, when you’re up there at the funeral, just imagine all of us at CMS standing right there behind you, handing you a tissue, squeezing your shoulder, all those supportive things. However, is this the Social Welfare League? Do we get paid for being humanitarians? We have software to sell here. Since that is what we do. So... We need you back here. I don’t mean to sound crass; I’m sorry to hear about your old man, but...”

“Yeah,” I said. “That’s nice. That’s beautiful.”

It essentially went like that until I was on the verge of quitting. But unfortunately, I didn’t. No, unfortunately I stayed right on with CMS—prostituting myself, returning in a day, as I was told, even if it meant alienating my brother Jeremy who already thought I was disrespecting the family as a result of my sparse presence at my father’s bedside. Part of me thought that Jeremy didn’t understand the demands placed upon me no matter how I turned the story over on him. To Jeremy it was all just a big exercise. The other part of me—the intuitive part—knew he was right. Yet I allowed CMS to govern my life.

In other words, surprisingly the idiotic CMS management style and thoughtless personal repartee didn’t seal it for me. You know what did? Boredom.
Actually it was the whole scene in Bethesda that was, well, rotten, if you want to know the truth. As far as I’m concerned, I had some difficulties. How do you put this? I suppose I had a tricky time with the attitude. I guess that’s how you’d put it. You know, the whole, faux-New York thing, the whole, “Well, I live in Beth‐esda” attitude of the locals, the way they intoned “My daughter is matriculating at Holton Arms this year,” or “My husband had lunch with Collin Powell this week. Blah. Blah. Blah‐blah‐blah.”

Ben even thought the kids at his school were, well, obnoxious: “Mom, they always ask how come I don’t have a Tommy Hilfiger jacket. They always ask what the brand of my shoes are.” Another thing in the mix was it took me an hour plus to get to work every day, even though I was only commuting ten miles away to Arlington. It was, well, miserable.

When I helped Ed write his letter of resignation we worded it as “The disgracefully unhealthy work environment” as one of his reasons for leaving. Yet—get this—Ed couldn’t get over the fact that Jack Plummer took the terminology to heart, apparently attacking him publicly in several staff sales meetings. Ed even said that Jack started one of the meetings by saying, “Some people around here think this is an ‘unhealthy’ environment, but actually…” It didn’t matter. Ed and I had to make a change. He was sick of boxes of software in his car, sick of twelve-hour work-days in windowless office buildings; and I, for one, wanted out of the suffocating snootiness and pretension.

I wanted to live in a community where my neighbors wouldn’t jump all over me for throwing out an aluminum can, or losing interest in signing their petition against clitorectomies in Sudan, or wherever. That sort of thing. I wanted to live in a place where a thousand consultants didn’t always clatter away at their laptops in the local Starbucks.
Ed

So we moved to the city. After much consternation, we decided on an area that was in the midst of sort of renaissance, an ongoing rejuvenation of which we felt we could be a part. Not that the city was devoid of snootiness. Not by a far shot. But there’s Dupont. There’s Georgetown. This was neither. This community had suffered through riots in the 60’s, dilapidation and flight in the 70’s and 80’s, and despite sparks of regeneration in the 90’s, it was an area on the brink, not past it. I had big plans, big ideas.

Denise was happy to be closer to work since she could take all the back roads, and she volunteered to support me while I got myself set up. My plans? My ideas? I wanted to set up a store in the bottom level of our house. What kind of store I wasn’t sure. I just knew I wanted a greater purpose in life. So, in the early stages of our time in the city—the first year or so—I spent twelve hours a day gutting and refurbishing the bottom levels. The upper half of the building was an already-lived-in Condo, small but livable. Two bedrooms, one bath, small kitchen. It would all be worth it once my dream materialized. Friends helped out on the weekends. Denise was great. Supportive as ever.

Ben

I like the park. I like when he takes me there. Sometimes we go to the park when he’s frowning and sad. Sometimes we go to the park when he’s happy. This time it was a happy time. We played Frisbee. We played wiffle ball. It was a perfect day. There were lots of clouds. Big puffy ones that he called something. I forget. And high flat ones that he called something else. Cumulumbus, I think. Some of the clouds were moving around and stuff, and it was sunny out.

Then we were both tired. We went back home, and he promised me mint chocolate chip ice cream. That’s my favorite. We walked down this sidewalk thing
that was all windy and turned here and there. There were lots of trees and bushes and flowers. It was like the only thing I could smell was honeysuckle. Then all of a sudden I noticed that he was sitting on the curb with his head back. His eyes were closed and I thought maybe he needed a nap. I didn’t think he ran that much, cause sometimes that’s how I get when I run a lot. He smiled like I’ve never seen before. He leaned his head back so far it almost touched the sidewalk. Then he said.

“Do you smell that?”

I said “Yeah.”

“No, there’s more. It’s...something else,” he said. His eyes were still closed and his head was floating around on his shoulders like it wasn’t really attached to his neck. He didn’t say anything, but just smelled the air over and over. Then he stood up and walked closer to a part of the bushes that sort of was caved-in. He leaned into the caved-in part, just smelling everywhere. He smiled so wide it made me scared. It was like those clowns you see in the movies that are smiling cause it doesn’t really mean they’re happy.

Ed

I don’t know exactly how the smells crystallized in my nose in that manner, but they were that clear. I could suddenly clearly distinguish each smell and how each smell bounced off and commingled with the others.

“Hold on,” I told Ben.

Ben has since told me that he tried to snap me out it for five or ten minutes, but I was not to be stopped. When I finally brought myself back to reality, I knew exactly what I wanted to do.

I’ve analyzed that primal moment every which way. Perhaps it was the moisture in the air (though it was dry). Perhaps the trauma of abandoning my former life was getting to me (though I had never been happier). Perhaps at my repressed mourning had finally struck me. Yet, it was, and always will be a singular moment. I
could have sworn I saw the face of God smile upon me. The clouds parted. Light filled me and surrounded my being. I was touched.

At that moment I knew I wanted to make perfume. I wanted to replicate that initial spiritual experience somehow. I found my calling.

*Denise*

First of all, it was really refreshing to see him so inspired after months of floundering and self-doubt. Ben helped him install countertops and lay the flooring; I had electricians rewire the place and tried to help with the financial end; he advertised. Still, I was worried since he knew little to nothing about making perfume, other than what supplies to order.

Then it came time for him to try his hand at the art. At that time before we went to sleep, every night he would excitedly tell me about perfume making. “The principle behind good perfume making is called effleurage,” he would say, “the idea that animal fats have attractions to certain aromas as uncovered butter absorbs the fragrance of pineapple in a refrigerator. See, the way it used to be done was to hold sheets of glass in wooden frames, coat them with fat, then place flowers in-between the sheets to add fragrance to the fat. After several rounds of flowers you’d take the fats, put them in a churn and beat them with alcohol. The scent passes to the alcohol, and you can do away with the fat. All you need is a fixative—civet, musk, and ambergris. Using the old methods, perfume is aged for nearly a year.”

“Sounds complicated,” I said.

“Yeah,” he said. “It does.”

At work I did some reading up on perfume making myself. It looked like in the past few years all sorts of micro-perfume makers have cropped up. Blame it on the Internet. Nowadays, it seemed like anyone, including my husband could buy all the basic ingredients including the scented alcohol. Then you can invent from here. The grunt work was reduced.
The next few months were a scramble to set up shop, while at the same time, learning a craft. But I thought, what better way to learn than to get customer feedback?

In the meantime I was reading everything I could get my hands on. I learned the standards first. The principles of effleurage, the whole framing process, more than I ever wanted to learn about fixatives, and the importance of the meniscus. I learned to add the solvent to the beaker, to add the other components later. I learned to always mix with a glass rod, to pour from cylinder to bottle instead of the opposite. It really was a vast and complex system, a mystical art. God through the nose.

However, after weeks of this, I discovered that I needed some real face-to-face advice. I still had a problem. I didn’t know how many scents a perfume can carry before it is overloaded, overly complex, or simply sloppy? Beyond five or six scents I had trouble distinguishing the grapefruit from the mulberry, the pikaki from the plumeria. Should I go beyond five or six scents? Everything I read was conflicting and contradictory. What was my limit?

Also, I felt drained, as if that initial inspiration had already slipped into just a process. I was trying to recapture something spiritual, something mysterious, and sublime. Perhaps it was doomed from the start.

I made a few calls and found out that the woman I needed to see was right in the city down in Dupont. Gale Frank.
Please. This guy looked at me like I was some sort of Katherine Hepburn prototype. So if I’m not the legend they say I am, what am I? I’m just an ordinary Jane, making ends meet on 19th Street.

The day he breezed in here was oh so dreary and blustery. “Welcome to Parfumes,” I said in my best queen sashay. I knew as soon as he saw me his eyes would pop out of his skull. Believe me: I wasn’t disappointed. So he expected an elegant old hag with beautiful silk scarves wrapped around her neck. Who am I to kow‐tow to the status quo?

“I was looking for Gale Frank,” he said.

“You found her,” I said. Then he sat down stammering. What a naïf.

“Oh,” he said. “That’s fine.”

“Of course it is, sweetheart.”

These urban raiders are all the same—they’re about as urban as Porky the Pig. I asked him if he wanted a Chai Latte. His eyes half‐glazed over, and he shrugged. He said he spoke to me on the phone, and asked me if I remember him. I thought, what does he think I’m retarded in addition? Then, as I was boiling the water I saw him glancing about at Claire Hubbard’s prints. Oh, if she only knew she’d throw a hissy fit. I put on Giselle, and he asked me faux‐casually about my store. I glazed over. Couldn’t help thinking about that lead at the Kennedy Center—the pirouettes, the leaps. Oh, it was a thing of beauty.

“The first thing I want to say is I don’t take this as competition.” Of course I said just to be nice. “We’re in this together. If you can turn people on to natural scents, all the better.” I hoped he would read the niceties as a kindly f‐you but, of course, he missed it completely.

“I appreciate that,” he said. “I understand, well”

“It’s fine. You need advice.”

“Yes. I’m stuck.” I handed him his tea in a one of those hand blown glass cups from the Laurs Hamburg Boutique. He pawed at it, and then stuck it in his mitt like it
was a three-dollar Santa mug from Wal-Mart. The tea was just what it was; that’s what I like about a good Chai Latte—I didn’t want this shchlub to think I was too refined. God help me if I come across as one of those Teaism snobs.

“Making perfume takes a certain witching aspect,” I told him. “At least that’s what I call it. You have to conjure up spirits.”

“You have to—”

“You must learn to allow the scents to come on their own.” I sat on the floor, legs stretched in front of me. I was so completely bored by this whole little visitation, and suddenly wanted to do some calisthenics right then and there—which of course, brought me back to Giselle.

“In other words...” He looked like a child sitting at his lesson, ready for a scolding.

“It’s intuitive. Personally, I like bold statements. I’d rather have a few declarative smells—vanilla, beeswax, jasmine somabane. Something like that. I’d rather have that than ten smells that blur into one.” Why was I telling him these things? I should have just booted him out back to the land of the quasi-urban middle-of-the-road.

“That was exactly—”

“It’s a common concern.” I bent forward, and took one last sip.

“But how do you know when it’s enough?”

“I’m always experimenting. Sometimes I’ll use seven scents, sure. Occasionally. But it’s intuitive. You find your own rhythm as you go.”

Then shortly thereafter I gave him the hook. That’s all she wrote. I made up this excuse about having to meet a friend at Galaxy’s, which I thought would disorient him. He thanked me profusely: “Thank you so much. Thank you. Really. Thanks.” Bleck. It was sickening. Who am I Mahatma Gandhi?
Jane

There were placards explaining the original religious purpose of perfumes—to incite communication between heaven and earth. Over thirty handmade perfumes lingered under the glass counters. Glass was everywhere. Tasteful prints. Jazz through the speakers. It was like Border’s only with perfume.

Lisa

Who wasn’t there? I chatted with Leon Bruce. Drank champagne with Phillip Ulger. Danced with Barry Hennigan. Sniffed samples with Pricilla Young. Sashayed with Vickie Sturgen. And the food! All kinds of great stuff. They had the best humus with this real sort of lemony tinge. I loved the pesto. Wonderful brie.

And the perfumes. They were all so beautiful to look at, first of all. It was like you were at a party, only it was just for you and your senses. The music was so heady. So superb, I had at least four or five glasses of the Argentinean wine.

Ed

Then I had to wait.

This was the toughest part. My emotional state. The first day shifted from elation (as the early customers at the opening sampled my creations, analyzed the scents, bought bottles of the Chypre) to boredom as they left and the midday lull set in, to utter depression as not a single customer came into the store all afternoon. Then, as I was about to close up shop and walk upstairs a young woman came in, and for a moment the morning’s elation returned. But she was looking for T Street, and I pointed her in the right direction.
Ben just got home from school when I walked upstairs. Denise and I had some
talks with him, and Ben was nothing if not resilient. He understood that he needed to
let himself in directly after the bus dropped him off at the corner. Ben was watching
afternoon cartoons when I picked him up over my shoulders and gave him a whirl.

Denise

For weeks business was slow for him. I felt terrible. He worked so hard for the
shop, he deserved a reward. After Ben was asleep we would sometimes place circulars
on cars in the surrounding neighborhoods. Even though I was tired from work I’d try to
help him talk strategy: how to market the shop so that it might get more interest. He
kept saying that maybe it was too much of a niche market, but I tried to tell him to
be persistent. Word of mouth takes some time. Then he said maybe we should just
rent out the space to another shop. No way, I told him. If we have to do that later on,
that’s fine with me, but give it a true effort first. Give it time.

Weeks passed. Then just as he was about to become completely despondent
and was ready to throw in the towel, he started getting customers. Then I realized
why more customers were coming his way: prom season. Then it slowed down again.

Ed

I started taking my customer’s zip codes, and you know what I realized? Most of
my customers were from the suburbs! The foot traffic on weekends was mostly
suburban, but so was the little business I got during the week. Hardly any buyers from
the community. I felt completely dejected, and I started to go on long walks during
lunch. I just wanted to see the still-present scars from the riots of the 60’s. I kept
asking myself what the hell I was doing.
Ivan

See, the thing is he just didn’t network. Everybody in this city knows that’s what it’s about. If he had made connections, talked to people, done his interpersonal glad-handing he would have at least had a support system. As it was, he and his wife and kid—they pretty much just stuck to themselves. This is fine and dandy in the burbs. But once you get out into the city and you want others to patronize your store, you have to grease some palms and caress some egos. He did neither. And I’m his friend. I love Denise and Ben. But they’re all too quiet.

I do feel sorry for him. Definitely. He seems like a nice guy and everything. His biggest mistake was just being himself. They just took whatever mentality they learned up in Bethesda and transposed that here. It doesn’t work that way. I tried to tell him. But he had to learn his own lessons. It doesn’t work that way.

Ed


Denise

One night he cried because he discovered Macy’s bought the old Palmer’s warehouse. He said they had already gotten started on renovating the building. He kept repeating: “Don’t you see? We’re behind the eight ball on this one. Don’t you see?”
**Brian**

I was eating a corndog. They give me some day olds down at that new grocery. It’s become good. It’s good. I got my ledge, and my regular grub. I was trying to get them flies away from me cause they keeps following me wherever I go. I don’t want to eat them suckers cause ain’t that how you get Malaria, or what you call it?

Then I saw them walking down 14th again. Every night. They walking along. They staring at them construction cranes and things. It ain’t something where they’re getting in my way. They’re not doing nothing to bother nobody. They just staring at that thing, and then walking back and forth up and down this street. Except it ain’t like they lost. It’s like they lost in the head. They keep saying “riots,” and “taxes,” and then some “gentry” word and then I lost em.

But if I ask em for some change they ain’t got any cause they broke. They told me that story twice. So I sit there on the curb and kick the can. I used to do it when I was six. Now I still do. Then something warm trickles down my leg. That’s life for you.

**Ed**

I kept thinking back to that moment. What went wrong? There was the spirit, the glimmer of divine intervention, and I was enlightened. The heavens opened up before me. Why would God deceive me? Why would God purposefully lead me down the path to my own self-destruction?

Yet, there I was wallowing in the Hades of personal finance. And I knew I had bigger problems looming. Why? I start doing some serious brainstorming. Extreme thoughts lapped at me.

**Charlie**
As usual I’m digging out there when this guy in a white polo shirt and khaki’s starts throwing rocks at me. I thought I heard something. I shut off the engine and then I see a rock hurtling straight into the side of this beast. Hits with a clank.

I jump down and start after the guy. Only thing is it takes me a minute to work my way out of the pile of dirt and by the time I make it to 14th street, he’s got to be at least a couple blocks away. I tell Mr. Anderson about it, but he says it’s probably just some anti-gentrification wacko. Some radical. Tells me to come and get him next time I see the clown.

*Gale*

The next time the fool comes to see me, I’m physically engaged, if you gather my meaning. But I hear the doorbell, and since I was expecting Will to come by, I didn’t want him barging in on the scene tinkling his copy of my keys. But it’s not Will. It’s Mr. Britches from U Street.

He tries to sugar-talk me, but as soon as I have him in there for more than a minute I know exactly what he’s after. Then he actually asks for it.

“Oh no,” I say. “I’m so sorry. I’ve been experiencing the same sorts of troubles myself. I don’t know what to tell you.”

This is when the waterworks burst onto the scene. The guy is an absolute Bhopal. I have to call his little woman to come and yank him off the floor. No Chai for Mr. Man this time. In the meantime I’m standing there, wig in hand, with Barry upstairs shitting bricks.
Farula

I tried to tell him there is no guarantee. If I make an image of each of them from pulverized stone mixed with gum, and I put the images facing each other in a vase with seven twigs, and then I bury the vase in the hearth and light a fire in it and put a piece of ice in the fire, then dig up the vase once the ice has melted, this is no promise on my part that anything can happen. I tried to tell him that.

“This works for love, but who knows if it will work for business?”

He paid me my sum any way, and walked out with his back in the shape of a C, and the faintest smell of honeysuckle on him.

Peter

It was really a no-brainer. Dude was caught red-handed. Over the past few weeks I heard all kinds of complaints of damage issuing from the Macy’s site. So I just made it a part of my loop. Every night I’d drive by it twice, hoping, just hoping I’d see that guy the construction crew were trying to sketch for me.

Then, around two in the morning one night, just as I was about to pull off from the curb on 14th, I see a guy climb over the chain link from out of the shadows of the site itself. He was carrying a bag over one shoulder, and he looked fragile weary to say the least. Dropping things, and barely able to walk straight. At first I thought he was drunk.

He didn’t see me at all. There was no pursuit. I just stepped out of the cruiser, followed him about a block and apprehended him at the corner of 15th and T. Easy pickings: the guy had all sorts of tools in his little knapsack. “Are you helping Macy’s with their construction work these days? Overtime?”

His response was to just stand there.

“So what were you doing over there then?”

“Trying to save my inspiration,” he said.
Then I walked him back to the cruiser, read him his Miranda, and ducked him into the car.

Denise

It’s a tragedy really. And what’s worse, now he feels cursed by God himself. I keep telling him that his moment of “inspiration” may not have been inspiration at all but delusion. It may not have been God come down to reap joyful havoc upon our lives. Perhaps the “inspiration” was actually the work of the devil. “Even if you don’t believe in that, you have to at least ask yourself,” I told him. I’m beginning to believe myself.

But he doesn’t talk to me. Now that the court date’s set he’s even more despondent. I try to get him out of his shell, get him talking, but he just sleeps. And when he’s not sleeping, he’s watching television. Switching the channels back and forth like a child. Sometimes I try to hold his hand, just to comfort him. I caress his arm. But Ed’s cold to the touch, and he hasn’t smiled in weeks. Ben is terrified, of course.

The saddest part is that Ed hasn’t gone inside the store for nearly a month now. He worked so hard to set it up, and then at the sign of financial ruin, he shriveled up like a raisin. He won’t even talk about it. I turn on the lights in there once a week or so just to make sure animals aren’t nesting under the counters or something.

I hate to admit this, but I’ve started praying. Neither Ed or I have ever been religious, but somehow we’ve been drawn into this mindset. Him through scents (and now he talks about black magic). Me, out of necessity. And the worst of it is, not only don’t I know how we went down this path, but I find myself asking for it to wend back to something close to our old lives. Back to Bethesda.
Denise Duhamel

Presidential Warranty

Thank you for purchasing this President! To activate this warranty, please return this document, within seven business days of his inauguration ceremony, along with the barcode of your fingerprints and your voter registration card. Your President is warranted by the United States of America, a division of Enron Corporation and Haliburton. We authorize no government official to change or add any of the President’s obligations under this warranty. His obligations for service and parts under this warranty must be performed by Enron Corporation or Haliburton or an authorized United States corporation that funded his campaign.

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, THROUGH ITS AUTHORIZED SERVERS, WILL:

1. Provide a replacement for any defective President due to faulty heating elements, deteriorated silicone seal, or cracks caused by thermal breakage (but not those caused by voter abuse).

2. Provide any replacement parts for President when said President’s malfunctioning is caused by his trim, shelves, or decorative parts.

NORMAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE VOTER:

This warranty applies only to Presidents in ordinary Presidential use, and the voter is responsible for the following:

1. Proper use of this President in accordance with instructions provided by this President and his administration.

2. Proper installation of this President in accordance with instructions provided by the Supreme Court.

3. Proper connection to a grounded power supply of sufficient voltage and money, replacement of blown fuses, repair of loose connections or defects in White House wiring.

4. Diagnostic costs and any transportation costs to service this President.

5. Replacement of light bulbs and/or fluorescent tubes (for those Presidents with such features).
EXCLUSIONS:

This president is guaranteed for up to four years from date of purchase, excluding:

1. Consequential or incidental damages such as property damage (in the United States or anywhere else on the globe) and incidental expenses resulting from any breach of this written or any implied warranty. Specifically, President will not be held responsible for damages in times of war.

2. A call to arms which does not involve provable malfunction or defects in said President. The voter shall always pay for all such calls to arms.

3. Damages caused by services performed by persons other than authorized Presidential servicers; use of parts other than Enron Genuine Replacement Presidential Parts; or causes such as Presidential abuse of power, Presidential misuse of power, voter’s inadequate power supply, or acts of God.

4. Presidents with original serial numbers that have been removed or altered and cannot be readily determined.

Keep a copy of the bill of goods you’ve been sold or some other appropriate payment record to establish this warranty, should service be required. If service is performed, it is in your best interest to obtain and keep all receipts. This warranty gives you specific limited rights. You may also have other rights (or be denied other rights) that vary from state to state. Service under this warranty must be obtained by contacting the President or an authorized Presidential server:

George Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
NW Washington, DC 20500
Phone Number: 202-456-1414

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It’s a nice little ride, and when you get there, boy oh boy. You see it’s worth it, despite all the twists and turnabouts. It can be, yes, if you like junky spaces in blank landscapes and a busted barrel or a coming attraction something like large living motion.

It isn’t far. You go up the highway for a while or a bit longer it seems, if you have to pee, until you reach the intersection. You’ll know the one. There’s nothing else around for miles unless you might notice the power lines. You turn left and go till you see where there are the two arrows that are back to back in a perpendicular direction? Then you keep going down more for about three and a half minutes and counting. You have to stop then, to rest, if you like.

The thing is, there’s really no place to go. At least, not around these parts. We’ve been here practically all our life, and we know. When we were so rabid in the beginning it mattered a whole hell of a lot, and we virtually inhaled every tidbit and morsel available and begged up to the seamless blue skies for more. We waited who knows for how long, and when after that snitch of telling time delayed the stuff came down and was spatter tainted, we had to improvise. All we serve up here now are beans and chocolates. People who need more than beans and chocolates move on. We tell them that we tried too, before we discovered beans and chocolates, but after we did things were fine.

Of course we’ve learned from experiences. We had no choice because our parents left us before they got cold. We took our plates and utensils and migrated to the great open solitary hoping to find the space that had escaped us when our parents did. We did the best we could and didn’t do too badly in the early hours.
Later, as retrospection pastime, and since we’d been to the mountain and wandered loose in the desert and scouted a few other locations in between and made our selection, we figured we’d seen enough to be in a position to judge or at least make a movie without going Hollywood. Hooray and amen. Give we thanks to those who came before us and paved our way with and through the light of distant but glittered stars. In the flicker of a frame or eye, what didn’t we see?

Not that we’d ever have wanted to force our opinions on others, but “To Our Own Self We Are Entitled To Be Faithful If Not True” irreconcilably became our motto long before we were aware of its importance in our future. It’s a bit long for a motto but we have a lot of meaning to pack into one sentence.

We used to pack heavy but our arms almost wrenched off and our legs all but bowed out, so we use ballistic nylon now to hold in our belongings and to release some of the weight so there’s that much less of a strain and more room for beans and chocolates preferably. With pureed raspberry sauce, freshly made and at room temperature. Not to mention whole wheat tortillas to scoop up and clear our palates. They also have the advantage of being duty-free so we didn’t have to feel guilty and pay. We owe them a lot anyway.

Out here the airspace was then naturally known to get piped in hot, and having to haul all that ballistic baggage tended to wear us down to the last layer of our old tire rubber huarache soles. Luckily, we didn’t sink into the sand because the part of the wasted land where we trod has been hard-baked from days and millennia of bright sunshine ’til death us do our part it. In that environment only the strong could survive so we made natural friends with the lizards and snakes and fuzzy-legged tarantulas; and yes, we partied in the high desert we did, mostly at night when the temperature was just right for dusky celebrations. We aren’t now and weren’t then stupid: we like to coax our insides out to show them light in the dark.

We used to find a lot of things out and there and by the old molded road without hardly even having to search. So very few findings were whole and fresh but we didn’t really expect they would have been given the circumstances under which we discovered them from beneath tight rocks and fugitive sand where the earth was
silk. We knew sadder histories had been told because when it was earlier there had been no perpendicular directions, no arrows left-right-up-down or north-south-east-west, depending on how they read the stars. Their way was questionable. What did they think they were going to find?

We, on the other hand, concentrated on where we put one foot in front of the other in case two of our friends happened to cross our path as we doubled back. We didn’t dare look up even after our rubber soles wore down and lost their tread, leaving only filled-in footprints. It was the only evidence that we knew our way around in the sand.

If we had wanted we would have reconstructed the history, but we were so full of it we had to use an extra large cart we’d borrowed from the natives that they’d fashioned from old flotsam, so we knew theirs was filled to the rim too. They were bent on following the sliver stream until it tasted out fully alkaline way outside the bleeding barbed wires. We didn’t bother to exchange names and places: we had no need to and we were mutually aware. We had only the slimmest of chances that any transaction between or among us was out of the question as we were dying to know. We opted for discretion.

By and by our discoveries grew in proportion to what there was to find or claim as what had before not been there, visibly red where the sun struck, but a pinkish gray where the wind gnawed. It was getting to be more than we had bargained for. There were tall ones and short ones and long lines that intersected on the margin and were in danger of falling off the page so to speak and into oblivion. Something had to be done if it was going to mean something. We were stumped for a while but the cactus we sat on kept spiking up thorny survival throbs and we took our inspiration from that, and knew we weren’t the only ones. We held on to our share of worries, but by then we’d put up the perpendicular sign again, so we followed in the direction the arrows pointed all the way to the place where they ended up.

We ended up there where the dust had risen then settled after the mother of a windstorm and the air was pure and the sky clear to heaven. It’s marvelous with a great view, especially from on high where you can see all the lines. The long and
short of them was not that far away from our vantage point, but we could only get there by going the long way around.

1:14 The lines might’ve been another story had we had the will to survive it. Instead, we were brought down and placed in back sooner than we wanted and were having a hard time adjusting. Be that as it may, we had been on high looking down. We kept looking as if we thought we could see all the way north as if it were up, but our sense of direction was off by a longitude or so along a latitude more or less. Yes we were lost but we knew the sign with the arrows was there somewhere like a rainbow in a clear blue sky after a rain pointed in the direction we were supposed to be. At its end was a pot of beans and chocolates with freshly pureed raspberry sauce on the side and whole wheat tortillas to use for burritos and come clean to our plates.

1:15 At that point exactly it occurred to us we might be thirsty. We’d been up for quite a while and didn’t need to pee but we were on our own and had no one to consult with. Then the generic swedes arrived suddenly smiling big and their skins all sunburned. We thought that might be why the thirst had come. Some had dark hair and others had not-as-dark hair but all were taller than anyone we had ever seen, although not as tall as the power lines. The vernacular swedish they spoke was unfamiliar to us, as was all common swedish. It sounded something like var är toaletten as a question and it made us curious and made us think differently. Maybe it was a matched set of tall mirages with a visual message, and we really did have to drain our water. But they assured us they were essentially swedes.

1:16 We knew it was true when they offered us some of their imported beans and Belgian chocolates. We countered with the raspberry sauce and whole wheat tortillas. By then we were trying to get rid of them. We’d had a bellyful and were beginning to feel bloated and corporeally out of control. They were very commonly gracious about it and offered to remove themselves to another part of the vaster untasted territory. They turned around and we wished them well to their backs about their sunburned skins and told them untruthfully that we were sad to see them go. They had on smiles like swedes but we didn’t see them because we were blinded by
the polished-to-a-high-shine chrome of the meandering trail of two thousand hubcaps placed strategically to interfere with our sightlines.

1:17 So instead we looked sideways and saw a half-ring formation of off-colored clowns with their grins petrified from baking all day in that hot enclosed but expansive space. They were out of place and airless but predictably floated trial balloons. Also, their paint was peeling and they uncharacteristically tried to call to us with the levitating balloons dyed brown to look delicious. This time we knew for sure it was a circulating mirage meant to make us feel as if we weren’t possessed and didn’t belong there with that oblique reminder about our absent parentage and abortive efforts to go native or plant airless balloons. They didn’t make sense: because they were false clowns. In reality they were mimes and we knew them for brass hussies, even there where we were with them. The upshot is we didn’t fall for it but there were consequences of the kind that made matters worse. The truth is the truth was not far behind and we were running on bare feet flapping our bearer arms around ourselves making mute signals. They left with their balloons behind them bobbing all in purple and chartreuse but without gaining weight.

1:18 By then we were desperate to be happy again and were down to kicking sand and prone to slicing the air with our useless fists for any small reason or none at all. And also the wind was picking up again more mighty and pushing its way toward us with a loudness that could bring hearing to the deaf, which we weren’t, so it was that much louder and we didn’t like what we were hearing one bit.

1:19 So at that conclusion we were nostalgic for arrows perpendicular or round and straight, anything to offset the then-hot current direction of the passing wind. We held our hands over our ears to stave off the bad vibrations but they persisted. And finally, when we opened our eyes we saw the eagles screaming away at us from their perch on the power lines. They were wrapped in fine silk-like cobwebs that glistened in the new sun.
Wishes

I wish... said the kid
If wishes were horses then beggars could ride
the ma said again
and again

the kid knows futile
learned early

no wish way out
kid stares at the calendar
imagines piles of calendars to wade through
don’t much matter what the picture is
it’s the time that matters
all those days
all those years
till gone till outa here
away from crazy ma

to make wishes the kid
thumbs another page
in the secret cave of covers

wishes need waiting
need hoarding need faith
the kid never learned faith
on high holiday visits to shul

kid doesn’t know what to think of faith
but files away more wishes by the day

If wishes were love then the kid would...
but the kid doesn’t want to ride there
Runaway

The kid reaches for the knob
tries to open door of the attic apartment
all tight angles triangles
the kid remembers from kindergarten.

The dad asks, where are you going?
kid wants away wants gone
wants outa here the kid
knows trap knows steel-teeth clench
knows fear is on the inside.

The kid tells the dad, wants leaving
the dad opens the door
dark stairs drop down and down
the dad walks with the kid stair
by stair at the bottom.
    opens last door
    cold air races in
streetlights through tree branches
shake shadows like fingers like claws.
The dad asks where will you go?
The kid looks out to dark
to impossible
the kid learns the kid is just a kid
no way to go alone.
The kid turns back to door
back to open to gone
climbs the stairs.
Almonds

The ma used Jergens
The narrow-necked bottle bibbed
in black label  scent of almonds

The kid breathed in tainted
each in hale
each breath-blackening sigh.

The kid took to breathing into a fuzzy lamb
centered on a blanket  dragged everywhere
breathed hollow  breathed deep.

The ma starts cutting bits
each day  the blanket shrinks
to lost lamb  then  to gone.

The kid turns to breathing blanket
bindings  silken borders tattered
and torn  to pajama sleeves
patterns fade inexplicably  a gray permanence
persisting  the kid cuts cuff from sleeve.
Hides  for years.
Hunger

The kid picks at the scab of dried something
on the fork
looks down the straw before lowering to glass.
Chocolate milk
never white
never anything like from the ma.

The kid walks on tiptoes
as much of feet off
floor as possible.

Some say it’s a genetic trait
for the kid it was floors
to be leery of
foot yanked scritch away.

Kid forked mashed potatoes flat
searching out lumps to avoid
lumps to stick
to block all air
to suffocate.

That’s what the kid thought.

Wished the ma would
as the ma crammed white bread and chicken
fat into her craw.

Maybe this time.

But the kid knew
escape was in the wait.
Julio Peralta-Paulino

Tourist Pet
—a story in eleven chapters

(eye socket)

I’m seventeen. I haven’t been doing this a long time. You see, I had problems with my father. Well, I had problems with my mother and father. Just one of those sad stories.

I have a baby girl. I have to buy her what she needs. That’s why I’m here.

I got pregnant at fifteen.

(brain case)

It was an accident. I had a boyfriend and one thing led to another. I didn’t want to have sex but he told me that if I loved him I would have sex with him and I told him that if he loved me he would wait. Then one night we were kissing and I was going to have sex with him but he forced me like he only cared about sex. Before I could even tell him how I felt and that I wanted to do it, he held me face down on the ground and forced me. I cried so much that night and he never came back to see me. He just wanted that I think. He just wanted sex. It was my first time and I got pregnant.

(dorsal fin)

Maybe some things are meant to be the way they are. I think about religion sometimes. I mean I believe in God. Sometimes, where I live, in front, there’s a
church and I’ll sit by the church door. I’ll sit there with a friend. I pray and stuff like that. I think I like religion. I just don’t go in.

When I was young, I went to church very often. I used to sing. Later, I realized it was like a business. Taking from the poor. That church from my old neighborhood. They were always asking for money. First it was just a regular house and then they turned it into a church. Saint Claire’s. The priest just got richer and richer.

(fin ray)

I don’t know. It’s not like I’m such a good person. I’m okay. I think I have a good heart. Money is not that important to me. It’s garbage. What I have, I spend on things that I need. For me or for my daughter. A person needs money, but I’m not ambitious.

(adipose fin)

I try to keep in touch with my parents. Well, with my mother. She’s more humble. I have a brother that gives her a lot of trouble. They actually had to go and leave home. He had a problem with a guy. Some guy. That guy chopped off one of my brother’s fingers. Shit. He actually wanted to kill him so my mother decided to move away in order to save, to avoid more trouble.

(caudal fin)

Last night, I made two hundred and twenty dollars. It was a good night. I talked to my mother. She called me at a friend’s house and I went over and gave her one hundred dollars. I would give her more but really I can’t afford to.
But with my father, I don’t want anything to do with him. He’s an idiot. When he found out I was pregnant, he almost killed my mother. He kicked me out of the house. That’s part of the reason I started doing this. I had nowhere to go and I had no money. Now he calls me a whore, but I call him a pig. I’m always clean and well dressed, while he’s always a mess. A pig in a sty. I try not to think about it. There are worse problems.

(anus)

Sometimes there are problems here with the police. They come around and force you to be with them. Some of them have even beaten up some of the other girls. A few times, they even make you give them some of your money. They say like if you don’t give me some money, I’m going to beat you. That’s what happens. They can’t arrest us because the patrol station is always full so they beat us.

(ventral fin)

Anyway, I’m just about done with high school. I took a test, but it didn’t go well. I want to go to college. I talked with my mother about it. I need some papers. She said she was going to help me get my documents. It’s funny. Last night, I dreamed I was in college.

I don’t know how much longer I can stay out here. I want to stop. Sometimes, I feel ashamed. I usually go with the tourists. Some of the other girls call me tourist pet. It’s just that when I see some of the men from here I can’t go because I feel so all, so ashamed. And when people walk by too I feel that too. I don’t want to be seen like this. I don’t know, I don’t want to talk about that.

(ribs)
I guess if I get the chance to go to college, I would want to study medicine. I’d like to be a doctor. I’m already like a nurse. Well, I took a course that lasted a year and six months and I graduated. I even worked in a clinic for a while. The thing of it was that the doctors used to bug me. Man, they bugged me all the time. They wanted to sleep with me you know to have sex. They even threatened to fire me. I just told them go ahead and fire me. Then they forced me I mean they fired me and after they fired me they refused to pay me what they owed me.

I told him off. He called me indecent. I told him he was married and trying to force me to have sex with him when I even knew his wife. Some men are worse than animals. They just want to use other people and they don’t care.

(pectoral fin)

They’re not all the same. Well, some women are worse than animals too. Men are just so much worse.

I have to go now. I see someone I have to see.

Look, maybe if you are around tomorrow we can talk some more. I like you, you’re quiet. I never talked to a real writer before. Remember, I’m Cymprini. Come tomorrow. I won’t charge you. I’m usually here by ten.
We were drinkers.

Kids elsewhere were known for other things. The country boys smashed rural mailboxes. Inner city kids looked for fights. The rich kids took drugs and slit their wrists. The weirdoes smoked dope and read Steal This Book by Abbie Hoffman.

Not us. As teens growing up in the sixties on the south side of the Chicago, we were defined by beer. Gallons of it. Quart bottles, six packs, twelve packs, half quart cans, kegs, gallon thermos jugs, coolers, laundry tubs packed with cans and ice: three cases of Pabst Blue Ribbon, and one of those 25 pound blocks of ice that tumbles heavily out of the machine dispensers built into the side wall of Town Liquor on 101st & Western Avenue.

Sure, sometimes one of us would get a half pint of Old Kentucky if he wanted to hide it at a dance, or if he had to conceal it in the bleachers at the ball park (we didn’t go to rock concerts). And we’d be stupid to pass up anything with alcohol—vodka, vermouth, bourbon or gin—if we could filch it from the wet bars in our parents’ knotty pine paneled rec rooms. But given our preferences, night in and night out it was beer.

We were not drunks, because most of the year we had to attend high school and get good enough grades so that we could get into college to maintain a 2-S draft status and stay out of the Viet Nam War. And in the summer, we’d go off to a part time job caddying at Ridge Country Club or as a lifeguard at the 79th Street beach, and in the afternoon meet up to go swimming at the pool or get our mitts for a game of baseball at Beverly Park on 103rd and Washtenaw.
We were not drunks, because drinking beer was just what you did on a Friday or Saturday night when you were sixteen and eighteen years old and you grew up with beer, probably since your father worked hard as a washing machine repairman for Sears, or maybe he sold cars for Tony Piet Pontiac on Western Avenue, and he kept a twelve pack of Hamms in the fridge to cool off after a hard day, and maybe to have on hand in case a neighbor stopped by.

Real drunks were old people who developed sclerosis, or rich people who drank Scotch and got divorced, or they were bums and winos (called homeless now), or maybe the Indians up north who went crazy from liquor, or, as Old Len said, the “spics” who spent their sod-laying money on tequila, or “shines” who spent their welfare checks on Schlitz malt liquor and on gin.

Not us. We weren’t drunks like Marvin Harne and Jim Hansen of the Hansen family with 12 kids we all went to school with, who lived just on the other side of Washtenaw, when in 1967, Marvin shot his best friend Jim in the head and then panicked and dragged him to the car and dumped his body off the Cal Sag bridge. They couldn’t charge him with murder since they never found the body, but Marvin owned up to his best friend’s Mom how they were power drinking 16 ounce cans of Budweiser in the Hansens’ basement when they started arguing and fighting, and it was an accident and he got scared.

No, we were not drunks, but clean cut all American kids whose parents voted for Ike or John Kennedy, and who had yard parties with high balls and gin and tonics for the grownups, and we’d better not touch any of it, though a sip of somebody’s icy cold Meister Brau was okay, and when you graduated high school maybe a barrel of Stroh’s was strictly a one time celebration and rite of passage for you and your friends as long as the old man kept an eye on things and nobody left the premises.

Hell, it was just cold beer. You could be under 21 and buy it yourself in some states like Wisconsin or Texas, and buy and drink as much as you wanted if you went into the army as my older brother did after his draft board was notified by a juvenile judge that he’d lent his i.d.’s to somebody who’d been in a wreck, so he was shipped to Germany, luckily, where, he said, he learned to drink “serious” beer, so that he
and some army buddies rolled a Volkswagen outside of Frankfurt—no harm done since they were N.A.T.O. and the VW was a rental, insured, and nobody was injured and they were soldiers blowing off steam.

Beer is all American and the official beverage at Chicago White Sox games, VFW halls, bowling alleys, block parties, church carnivals, and community picnics. You can’t very well drink whiskey nonstop in the hot sun while pitching horseshoes or playing softball, but you can do it with beer. From sunup till sundown, you can enjoy your beer and function normally. Anything is possible with beer.

We were not drunks, though most of us had a pretty good taste for it by the time we were 17, and with my first paycheck from Jewel foods where I bagged groceries to earn tuition money for commuter college, I bought a set of fake i.d.’s for thirty dollars from one my friends who’d already had his own and knew the guy who printed voter’s cards and authentic military driver’s licenses, which were official looking and done in half tones and could be Xeroxed. There were even a couple of backers to go along with it, like a United Auto Workers i.d., and everybody who had them knew exactly where they would or would not be accepted.

For us the easiest place was at Hugo’s in the far south side. It was an old time neighborhood bar where Hugo served drafts for 35 cents, and all of us went in there so regularly that after a while he stopped carding us. There’d be Hugo, about 50 years old and short and fat behind the bar, and another old guy, his friend, on our side of the rail where there’d be me and “E. the B.” (nicknames of my friends and brothers) and Old Len and GB and S-Man, Bones, Bohawk, the brothers Cowballs and Zeke, Emil, H.J., Uncy, Robot, Wolf, Titty, and O.E.E. pounding down as many drafts as we could on a Friday afternoon before Hugo wanted for us to scram before the adults started drifting in after work. So he’d tell our spokesperson Len that it was time to go, and we’d order up enough carryouts to see us through the night and maybe through Saturday, too, if we had enough room in the car.

We’d haul it over to Ernie’s house (that was E. the B.) since he lived in the basement and his parents never came down, and we’d drink and smoke cigarettes, and Ernie would pull out the cards with naked women on the front and we’d play
poker and have eclectic arguments. We talked pretty philosophically about things, getting all beery and light headed from dehydration, and numb but loose-limbed, and single minded. We argued about the war, since S-Man lost his deferment and was being called up, and I said I’d go to Canada if my lottery number came up, and Len said oh go screw yourself let’s go down to Old Town, and we’d pile into Len’s parent’s white Ford Galaxy with a three speed on the column and the cassette player with Simon and Garfunkel singing “Mrs. Robinson” all the way up the Dan Ryan and along Wells Street.

We didn’t go downtown too often since the strip joints cost an arm and a leg to get in, and then you had to nurse your two-drink minimum since they each cost as much as the cover charge. But the bouncers always honored our fake i.d.’s, the same as at Eddie’s Jolly Inn back in the suburbs on Harlem Avenue, which was a lot cheaper; and unlike the downtown strippers, at Eddie’s they took everything off and would fool around with you at the bar or at your table, but we learned that they were transsexuals, some so sexy we didn’t believe it, so we still went there once a month or so.

It’s good I wasn’t driving, not so much because of the several quarts of Old Style I’d had by then (we drank so fast that it was too much trouble to bother with smaller bottles), but because I had a “piss poor” sense of direction, the way Old Len used to describe it. And sometimes Len wasn’t so good, either. He’d pull out in front of somebody or pop the clutch of that Ford, and more than once the cops would pull us over, and in a minute there’d be three or four squads, and there’d be eight or ten cops, some grilling Len, others asking GB, who was an athlete, about Leo High School’s basketball team, another transferring the beer from our car to theirs, still others asking Robot whose father was a politician if he knew this guy or that guy, and pretty soon it’d be like a goddam impromptu Fraternal Order of Police meeting in red blinking lights right on goddam California Avenue.

Len would start joking with them and explaining how O.E.E. got his name (one-eyed eater), or how Cowballs got his (you don’t want to know except that Len christened him with that in the changing room at the Beverly Ridge public swimming
pool), and that S-Man meant not superman but Sperm-Man or that Titty was just a more graphic identifier of Teddy who was overweight and bulging, and they’d be laughing and weren’t all shocked when O.E.E. asked for our beer back, though one of the cops said pretty sternly that O.E.E. had the balls of a moose and maybe he should be locked up in the shithouse for the night, and O’ just smiled and took a drag off his Marlboro and said how about giving us at least half of it back.

By then and because the cops had to radio in, one of them said a squad lieutenant was on the way and they shooed us back into the Galaxy and told us we’d better get the hell out of there fast.

It was pretty much that way all the time in those days, when no police would go through the impossible paperwork of trying to write someone up for a D.U.I. So drinking while driving around was about the safest way to spend the evening, though sometimes if someone were really weaving badly or drag racing down 87th Street, we might get a speeding ticket and our beer confiscated and told we’d better get our asses back home.

One afternoon about ten of us met up at Hugo’s and he got a little bit nervous since there was so many, and after the first round when he gave Len his change, he also slipped him a note that said it was a plainclothes cop at the end of the bar and that “young ones better scram.” Len would later smile and shake his head and say Hugo “nearly shit” when all ten of us cleared out at the same time.

From there we went to Kennedy Park where we could always get one of the older fellows who graduated from Mendel or St. Rita to run an order without much trouble, except that they always took extra money on top and came back with the cheapest beer like Blatz or Drewery’s or some pale ale swill we’d never even heard of but drank up anyway since we hadn’t much choice.

When we were low on funds and couldn’t afford the Kennedy Park service fee, we’d fight over who would try to buy at Gee Jay’s on 79th and Western or the Walgreens at 95th, which sometimes didn’t card and sometimes did.

Or we’d drive all the way over to the Baby Doll Polka Club where they were happy to have us sit in and sip drafts, or as a last resort, we’d drive east of Western
and find a “shine” bar where we could always make a buy if someone were brave enough to go in.

The best, of course, was summer time when folks’ parents and the younger children would go on vacation to the Wisconsin Dells or all the way up to Minocqua, and we’d stay back home, all beered up for a week, with parties afternoon and night. Not like the house party in *Risky Business* with all the neighborhood kids that parents would inevitably find out about, but serious bashes with poker and arm wrestling and professional women like Fran and Diane from 74th & Ashland, or maybe a herd of *strange* that Zeke and Cowballs could always manage to round up from outside our area.

Like one night when Zeke and Cowballs pulled up in their identical Chevy Super Sports with 8 girls from the Bush or the East Side by the steel mills, and we pulled an all nighter, and I had my first significant date with a skinny girl named Katie, and I don’t remember that much about it except that we ended up in the walk-in pantry with the door closed and the light turned off but which I had to turn back on when Katie threw up.

When the girls went home the place was a wreck, and most of the boys were staying on through the morning. Len never went to sleep—said the kegger wouldn’t be much good the next day, so he sat with his arm draped around it till morning which was the day we all went outside at sunup and took all our clothes off and showered under the garden hose which we propped up on the basketball standard and then decided to drip dry by running up and down the sidewalk down our block, a spectacle witnessed, we later found out, by Mrs. Giovanni who was cool enough not to tell my parents when they got back home.

We weren’t really drunks, just teenagers, and it was all pretty clean fun. No drugs, no crime, really, and unlike Marvin Harne, none of us shot anybody, though one night I waited in a tree out front for my sister, was going to scare her when she pulled up because she had had her fill of our using the house that week for parties and threatened to tell. I did it up right, with a costume and all, kind of a loincloth and a
butcher knife, all a gag, which she didn’t appreciate too much when I jumped down right next to her, all in clean fun.

Or the time Emil got jumped at the Burger King by the 95ers, some goofy-ass white gang who didn’t like something Emil said, which we could almost understand since Emil would get beer balls and call people out just for looking at him. It was August and hot and we all piled into Titty’s car with rocks and clubs and I had this 12 inch metal bar I had sawn off at the factory where I had a job that summer, and Len said later it was lucky no 95ers were around since She-Dog (the nickname he gave to me—don’t ask me why) would likely be facing a murder rap, the “mental bastard.”

We weren’t drunks, because it was teenage stuff, ala Little Rascals or the Bowery Boys, and boys will be boys, which is pretty much the way Len’s parents figured it. After they caught wind of the near rumble with the 95ers, they figured that although they couldn’t staunch the flow of Busch and Miller’s, it might be better if we did our drinking in their basement, rather than anywhere else, since it would keep us in the neighborhood and out of serious trouble.

Which it did, mostly, for several years, even as we got older and started to get married to girls from the neighborhood or whom we met at work and school who had fathers and brothers a lot like us. Every Friday, through all four seasons, there’d be 6, 12, sometimes 20 of us together in Len’s basement, playing cards, shooting pool, listening to music, hanging out, and getting right on cold, sudsy beer.

O.E.E. and Bones and Chubsy had turned 21 and regularly ran the orders for us. Old Len would make us put our initials on our quart bottles and our six packs before they went into the fridge in his basement so there wouldn’t be any fights over somebody stealing somebody else’s.

S-Man returned safely from Nam, but he was more into dope than drafts, so we didn’t see him much anymore. And we saw less of Bones and Chubsy, too, since they had gotten girlfriends, fiancés, and jobs and didn’t need the basement sanctuary.

But O.E.E. still came around. We’d see him at the start of the evening, and then at the end, when he’d clomp down the wooden stairs at 2am after a date,
dressed nice but with his tie loosened, to see if there was still a poker game going that he could get into.

We waited for him to come, since he was funny and cool and sincere and became a kind of mentor for us, especially on matters of sex. He’d hide his poker hand, looking over his glasses, and while waiting for Bohawk to get back from the john to say whether or not he was still in the game, O.E.E. would tell us how he got in this girl’s or that girl’s pants, or what particular kind of sex act Jessica liked best, or how he forced the issue with Priscilla when after the movie he stopped at Walgreens and told her he was buying rubbers. When he came back out and saw she was still in the car, he knew he was “in like Flynn” and headed west to the Miami Motel on Cicero Avenue.

I was enthralled by his adventures, as were most of the other guys, but some like GB thought he must be making everything up, or else why would he be wasting time with us at 3 in the morning.

The following Friday O.E.E. came downstairs after a date with Jessica and walked directly up to GB, held out his finger, and said, “Smell this.” GB believed him after that, and we all got up to have a smell of it ourselves.

O.E.E. finally found a nice girl that he married, and we all eventually turned 21 but continued to go to Len’s house on Friday nights, when our younger brothers who were 16 and 17 started filling the chairs around the table. We were the ones who ran the orders, and we still went to the card games even as we started to get jobs and get married and graduate from college, until we were all shaken the week before Christmas when O.E.E. was killed instantly in a collision on the Dan Ryan expressway. He had gone to an office party and got pretty “pie-eyed” as Len explained at the wake, and he got on the interstate going the wrong way and plowed into several cars before he could get turned around. An autopsy showed that he was legally drunk at the time that he was going around 105 miles an hour northbound in the southbound lanes, with a backseat filled with Christmas gifts for his wife and his son.

We were not drunks. O.E.E. had just gone too far and we should have warned him. We had a memorial service for him at Panos’s Lounge on 95th and Kedzie, lining
up mugs of draft beer—Heineken since it was a solemn occasion—filling up one mug for O.E.E. and placing it in front of an empty chair.

Some people would just sometimes forget their limit, the way O.E.E. did, or like when Robot, crazy bastard, woke up in his car surrounded by police, after he had fallen asleep, he said, and plowed into several parked vehicles. He wasn’t hurt, but the cops roughed him up some.

Wolf wasn’t as lucky, when he and Emil got in a wreck and Wolf went off walking down 127th Street for help and got picked off by some sonofabitch driving and drinking beer, bashed up into the air on a January night, and clipped by a second car going the opposite way as he body fell to the snow crusted street. He was in the hospital for over a year and they had to take one of his legs.

And though I don’t recall if it was after or before Wolf, Emil was jailed after kicking out the plate glass window of a clothing store when he was in one of his rages on a Saturday night. He went on the wagon after that, and he was divorced from the woman who caused his rage, so alls well that ends well.

We weren’t drunks, for it was a sucker punch that knocked me out after an argument in an Oak Lawn tavern about a dart game. Another time, when GB came to on the asphalt of a parking lot of an Alsip joint, beaten and bloodied, he maintained none of it would have happened if it weren’t for a vindictive bartender who slipped him a mickey earlier in the night.

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We weren’t drunks. Mostly we had a lot of laughs.

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We laughed at an all night party we had at Jewel when we stock boys were locked in to load the shelves and mop the floors, and instead we drank the beer we
smuggled in, cooked steaks on the stove in the Jewel Deli, and watched the hockey
game on the TV in the butcher shop.

We laughed at E. the B. getting out a bucket and pretending to mop up after
one of the female “sweat hogs” at one of the all nighters in Len’s basement.

We laughed when Bohawk and E. were pulled over for racing his Shelby
mustang against a red Corvette down 95th street, and how the cops were Mustang
aficionados (Bohawk won the race) who actually gave the beer back that time.

We laughed over S-Man’s courage in spraining his ankle while sliding into
second base at Comiskey Park after a victory, and of his charming the cops with his
knowledge of baseball trivia, so that they let him go.

We laughed about how Ernie won a girl away from Cowballs in one of the poker
games in his basement, and how he introduced her to the rest of us as “7 Card
Colleen.”

We laughed about Len picking up women at the AA meetings and taking them
to Bleekers for a pitcher of beer.

We laughed the night Bones was pulled over in Willow Springs and told six
uniformed officers that they were “uneducated sonsabitches” who could kiss his Irish
ass.

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Today we reminisce about those old days, especially when we go to see Old Len
for a few beers at the Legion Hall, which is the only saloon within walking distance of
his house, so we go there since he can’t drive after wrecking two different work
vehicles and losing his license and then his job and finally his pension, though he still
can get by with some unemployment benefits and a little inheritance from his late
mother.

It made the papers when he was arrested for having violated the restraining
order secured by his ex wife, after he was found parked in front of her house with a
.357 magnum on the seat next to him. It sounded way worse than it was, since he was
merely in possession of the weapon he had bought some months earlier for a gig he had as a security guard in the neighborhood bank.

We laugh at the Legion to remember how weeks later he had to borrow my car to check up on his ex old lady, and the cops were at my door at 3am asking if I would go with them to get the Pontiac which was wrapped around a light pole at 95th and Damen, and there was Old Len, red-eyed, beery, and talking a mile a minute, mesmerizing the cops with his tale of marital woe, asking what they would do if they looked through a window and saw their ex-wife blowing some stranger sitting in what used to be Len’s old recliner.

When the watch commander was reported to be on his way, the cops on the scene packed both me and Len into the tow truck and told the driver to get us the hell out of there.

So the cops “sucked it all in,” said Len, and he got off scott free—not even a ticket. And the insurance paid for my totaled vehicle with even a few dollars left over, so that Len said I “made out like a bandit.” Today Len’s liver enzymes are off the charts and we worry about what will happen, but laughing is the best thing.

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But we’re not drunks. We’re older now. A couple of us didn’t make it, but that’s life.

We had our kicks when we were young, and those of us who still have our health, still enjoy a few beers. Not as much or as often as the old days, but now we drink better brands, and our wives do most of the driving.

Among us today are lawyers and accountants and tradesmen and professors and entrepreneurs. A couple went on the wagon or in and out of AA, but who out there doesn’t know someone who has? Half of us are divorced, but isn’t that the national average?

No, we weren’t drunks—just making our way, making life fun. Why don’t they use that in the commercials: Drink beer to make life fun.
We weren’t drunks. We didn’t require beer. But it helped us stick together, the way classic car restoration or Civil War history or golf unites other men. Beer made us enjoy each other, as it seemed to help us be funny, brave, loyal, strong, sexy, musical, patriotic, angry, folksy, rebellious, confrontational, honest, proud, emotional, and stoic—attributes which you could see testimony about in the beer commercials on TV. Not that those things weren’t already inside of us. Beer helped us feel them.
Kenneth Carroll

Tongues

“He who makes a beast of himself gets rid of the pain of being a man.”
—Samuel Johnson

I trip over the names of foreign cities
where weird horticulturists are trying
to grow daisies in shifting semantic sands
where peace is fertilized with decomposing bodies

where men speak in silly vernacular
describing brutal death in technical jargon
& john wayne clichés,
“meeting the enemy wherever they are”

here in cities whose names are familiar
to my tongue, a beast of a man is lying,
assuring the blinded faithful of a victory
anointed in tears

this political anthropoid does not feel
is not moved by escalating funerals
does not dream of the humanity of his enemies
cannot hear their death rattles & the wailing of families

here, he selects new victims, garnishes their
intentions with the cruel moniker of hero
sends them off to perish in a lottery of killing
an assured roulette of wasted humanity

In foreign cities a clash of foreign tongues
men are learning that pain can be
assuaged in beastly acts, they are learning
a language that requires no healing
Poetry Club

for Nikki

a woman is yelling from a doorway
august lingers like the smell of burning wire
she is admonishing children who are not hers
“get off that tree, they planted it for the dead girl”

I wonder if this tree will live long enough
to be baptized in a dc thunderstorm
or provide shade for the weary at the bus stop

this sapling, named after the girl you murdered,
reminds me of your first poem
full of promise, in need of care

I looked for that poem
when I got the news
all sudden & sideways
& easy to doubt

not like the movies, where an old white dude
with a calm modulated voice asks you to sit down
instead a 15 year old blurts out this horror
launching it abruptly into my brain without
count down or build up “Nikki killed dat girl”

I hold myself together with feigned ignorance
wishing to have no knowledge of a language
capable of conveying the story of a butcher knife
plunged into the future of a 14 year old by a
13 year old

but the young voice thwarts my retreat
into this mirage of denial, wants to know
when the poetry club will start again
as if there is a poem big enough to fill the
gaping hole that has produced this obscene absence

I watch you walk again for the first time
into my workshop, hands on bouncing, narrow
hips, eyes already rolling without provocation
you pretending not to listen but refusing to
leave, your smile a scrim for your anger
looking for your poem, I find your picture
I want to run to the court where you are being arraigned
insist that the judge examine your smile & imagination
demand that they be declared exculpatory evidence

but he will show me this tree,
this thin frightened maple, its root
fertilized with blood & a grandmother’s tears
bearing the name of a dc holocaust victim

I remember how you snatched your poem from me
your response to my compliment, you hop-scotching
between rage & joyous innocence
the 15 year old wants me to believe
that you would have traded that knife for a pen
that behind all that sucking of teeth & attitude
was a poet’s face trying to recognize itself

When are we going to start the poetry club again,
I hear between the pulsing migraine of words
that tell me you are a murderer, that repeat a
mantra louder than a February chorus of I’ve
Known Rivers, “Nikki killed dat girl.”

I long for the belief of zealots & new lovers
wish that I could believe in the ability of words
to replace embraces, could believe that children
sent to or left to be swallowed by despair on this
side of the river, can choose life & art when
death & destruction are more potent & available

I remember how you returned your poem to me
crumpled up like hardening snow
unleashed from your fist onto my desk
its only edit, your signature & an august
thunderstorm gathering above your smile.
Jonah Postponed

Jonah was postponed by the whale
On his world-circling trail
To Joppa.

We go around the world
Only to find
A whale around us like the sky.
Contributors


Born in Yerevan, Armenia, Shushan Avagyan graduated from Cedar Crest College, Allentown, Pennsylvania, in 2001 with a degree in bookart and printmaking. Translated many texts, including Vazken Azatian’s third edition of *Armenia: A Guidebook,* published in 1999. Participated in Dr. Carolyn Segal’s Workshop in Creative Writing at Cedar Crest, where many original poems were developed. Was awarded second place in poetry at the Hildegard Festival of Women in the Arts CSU Stanislaus, Turlock, California. Received the First Prize at the 2002 Armenian Allied Arts Association’s Literature Contest. Interned at the Women’s Studio Workshop in Rosendale, New York, 2001. Have been publishing poetry in the online Literary Groong of Armenian News Network since 1999. Poems have appeared in the *Mochila Review* and the *California Quarterly.*

Jay Baruch lives and works just outside Providence, RI, where he practices emergency medicine and teaches medical ethics at Brown Medical School. His fiction has appeared in *Other Voices,* *Another Toronto Quarterly,* *Inkwell,* *Segue,* *Fetishes,* *Ars Medica,* *Issues Magazine,* and *Salt River Review.* His stories have been selected finalists for writing contests sponsored by *Glimmertrain* (Short Story Award for New Writers) and *Inkwell.* "Road Test" will be appearing in his collection of short fiction, *Fourteen Stories,* forthcoming from Kent State University Press in 2007. His collection of short fiction was recently named a semifinalist for the Iowa Short Fiction Prize.

Kenneth Carroll is a native Washingtonian, his poetry, short stories, essays, and plays have appeared in numerous publications including, *Black Literature Forum, The Lion Speaks: An Anthology for Hurricane Katrina, Turn The Page And You Don't Stop, In Search Of Color Everywhere, Bum Rush The Page, Potomac Review, Worcester Review, the Washington Post, American Poetry: The Next Generation, The Next Frontier, Icarus, Segue Online Journal, Spirit & Flame, Drumvoices Review, Potomac Review, Gargoyle, and Indiana Review.* His book of poetry, *So What: For The White Dude Who Said This Ain’t Poetry,* was published in 1997 by Bunny & The Crocodile Press. He has had two plays produced, *The Mask,* and *Make My Funk The P-Funk.* He has performed at the Kennedy Center, Nuyorican Café, Beyond Baroque, Gala Hispanic Theater, and at universities around the country. He is executive director of
DC WritersCorps, Inc. and past president of the African American Writers Guild. He teaches creative writing at the Washington Writers Center. He received a 2005 Literary Fellowship from the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, was nominated for a 2004 Pushcart Prize for Poetry, and also received the Mayor’s Award for Service to the Arts. He was featured in the Smithsonian Museum of African American Culture. He is married and the proud father of a daughter and two sons. He can be reached at blakpoet@aol.com.

Ruth Daigon was founder and editor of POETS ON: for twenty years until it ceased publication. Her poems have been widely published in e mags, print mags, anthologies and collections. Daigon's poetry awards include The Ann Stanford Poetry Prize, (University of Southern California Anthology, 1997) and the Greensboro Poetry Award (Greensboro Arts Council, 2000). The latest of seven books include Handfuls of Time (Small Poetry Press, Select Poets Series 2002) and Payday At The Triangle (Small Poetry Press, Select Poets Series 2001), which is based on the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire in New York City in 1911. One of her many readings was performed in The Lower East Side Tenement Museum in Manhattan, the area where the fire occurred. Daigon's poetry was published by the U. S. State department in its literary exchange with Thailand, and the department’s translation program has just issued the first book of Modern American poets in English and Thai in which she appears. Garrison Keillor featured her poetry on his morning poetry show. She has just cut a poetry CD, The Slow Caress of Years, for Jaimes Alsop Productions, and will appear in Alsop's hardcover anthology. Daigon appeared in The Mississippi’s Review’s issue on War and its Aftermath. A chapbook has just been published in India, and another of her poetry books is in the process of translation into Spanish in Argentina.

Denise Duhamel’s most recent books of poetry are Two and Two (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), Mille et un sentiments (Firewheel Editions, 2005), and Queen for a Day: Selected and New Poems (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001). Her other titles include The Star-Spangled Banner (winner of Crab Orchard Award in Poetry, Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), and Kinky (Orchises Press, 1997). An associate professor at Florida International University in Miami, she co-edited, with Nick Carbo, Sweet Jesus: Poems about the Ultimate Icon (The Anthology Press, 2002). Her poems appear on webzines such as Double Room, Big Bridge, Shampoo, Ducky, Slope, Caffeine Destiny, X-Stream, Muse Apprentice Guild, and Blackbird: An Online Journal of Literature and the Arts.

A new collection of poems, Asylum in the Grasslands, is forthcoming from the University of Arizona in the fall of 2006.

James Grinwis lives in Amherst, MA, and received an MFA from UMass in '00. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in American Poetry Review, Gettysburg Review, Conduit, Typo, Snow Monkey, and about fifty others.

Katharine Haake’s most recent books are a novel, That Water, Those Rocks (2003), and a collection of short stories, The Height and Depth of Everything (2001), both from the University of Nevada’s Western Literature Series. Her first book of stories, No Reason on Earth (1986) was from Dragon Gate Press. New stories have recently appeared in The Iowa Review, Witness, One Story, and The Santa Monica Review, and were featured in the online magazine, Segue, as well as in the New Short Fiction Series, LA’s only “live literary magazine.” She is at work on a novel. A recent recipient of an Individual Artist’s Grant from the Cultural Affairs Department of the City of Los Angeles, she was also recognized as the 1998/99 Jerome Richfield Memorial Scholar at California State University, Northridge. Her other books are What Our Speech Disrupts: Feminism and Creative Writing Studies (NCTE, 2000) and, with Hans Ostrom and the late Wendy Bishop, the textbook Metro: Journeys in Writing Creatively (Longmans, 2001). She currently chairs the Creative Writing program at CSU Northridge, where, since 1986, she has taught and developed a wide range of courses in narrative, writing, and theory.

Andy Jackson quit the Australian Public Service, and closed the inner-Melbourne café and arts venue he co-owned, in order to write. His poetry, fiction and reviews can be found in Salt-Lick New Poetry, Real Time, Sleepers Almanac and Space New Writing, and online in Hutt, Cordite and Big Bridge. He is currently working on a collection of poetry with a new work grant from the Australia Council, themed around how identity is experienced and unsettled through the body. He is also developing collaborative projects with two sound artists. He can be contacted via captainoverload@yahoo.com.au.

Christopher Kelen is a well known Australian poet whose works have been widely published and broadcast since the mid seventies. The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature describes Kelen’s work as ‘typically innovative and intellectually sharp’. Kelen holds degrees in literature and linguistics from the University of Sydney and a doctorate on the teaching of the writing process, from UWS Nepean. Kelen’s first volume of poetry The Naming of the Harbour and the Trees, won an Anne Elder Award in 1992. In 1988 Kelen had won an ABA/ABC bicentennial award with his poem “Views from Pinchgut.” In 1996 Kelen was Writer-in-Residence for the Australia Council at the B.R.Whiting Library in Rome. In 1999 he won the Blundstone National Essay Contest, conducted by Island journal. He also won second prize in the Gwen Harwood Poetry Award that year. In 2000 Kelen’s poetry/art collaboration (with Carol Archer) Tai Mo Shan/Big Hat Mountain was exhibited at the Montblanc Gallery in Hong Kong’s Fringe Club. And in 2001 another collaboration (essay and watercolour) titled Shui Yi

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Meng/Sleep to Dream was shown at the Montblanc Gallery. Both exhibitions have been published as full colour catalogues. Kelen’s fourth book of poems, Republics, dealing with the ethics of identity in millennial Australia, was published by Five Islands Press in Australia in 2000. A fifth volume, New Territories—a pilgrimage through Hong Kong, structured after Danté’s Divine Comedy—was published with the aid of the Hong Kong Arts Development Board in 2003. In 2004 Kelen’s most recent chapbook Wyoming Suite—a North American sojourn—was released by VAC Publishing in Chicago. In 2005, Kelen’s long poem “Macao” was shortlisted for the prestigious Newcastle Poetry Prize and a re-edited version of Tai Mo Shan appeared in Southerly. Apart from poetry Kelen publishes in a range of theoretical areas including writing pedagogy, ethics, rhetoric, cultural and literary studies and various intersections of these. Kelen is an Associate Professor in the English Department at the University of Macau, where he has taught Literature and Creative Writing since 2000. Kelen is the principal investigator in the University of Macau’s “Poems and Stories of Macao Research Project” and the editor of the on-line journal Writing Macao: creative text and teaching.

Brian Kiteley has written two novels, Still Life With Insects and I Know Many Songs, But I Cannot Sing. He has recently completed a book of fiction exercises, The 3A.M. Epiphany. His third novel, The River Gods, was completed in December of 2002. He has received Guggenheim, Whiting, and NEA fellowships. His fiction has been anthologized in The Best American Short Stories and The Four-Way Reader. Kiteley teaches at the University of Denver. He welcomes questions via email and warmly invites visitors to his web site, as well.

Ginger Knowlton’s poetry and prose have appeared or are forthcoming in swerve, 5_trope, Double Room, Sentence, The Evansville Review, Tarpaulin Sky and the Bark, amongst others. She has received awards from the Academy of American Poets and Rocky Mountain Women’s Institute. A few of her paintings are held in private collections across the country. She is the editor of divide: creative responses to contemporary social questions, and she teaches at the University of Colorado.


Barbara Maloutas received a BFA in design at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia and studied for five years in Basel, Switzerland. Barbara has been in
design education since 1988 and assistant chair in Communication Arts at Otis College of Art and Design since 1996. Barbara received an MFA in Creative Writing from Otis in 2002. She has designed and typeset poetry books for Littoral Books, Marsilio/Agincourt and Green Integer. Barbara is one of the winners of the 2003 New Issues First Book of Poetry Contest for In A Combination of Practices and the winner of the 2003 New Michigan Press Chapbook Contest for Practices. Her work has also appeared in Aufgabe, Tarpaulin Sky, Free Verse, BeAware, Good Foot, and Diagram (winner of 2003 Chapbook Contest and runner up in 2004). Prose from her manuscript Evropi: A Handbook of Consolation has appeared in FreeVerse and The New Review of Literature. Poems from In a Combination of Practices are anthologized in Intersection: Innovative Poets of Southern California. She continues to write short imagistic prose works of European reminiscences that annoy some workshop participants because they aren’t exactly poems.

David McGrath's short story "Bayou La Batre," based on the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, appears in the current Spring 2006 issue of Open Spaces magazine. His writing has appeared in Fourth Genre, Chicago Reader, L.A. Times, Sport Literate, Artful Dodge, and The Paumanok Review, among others. His essay “Castle in Ruins” was a finalist in the EdPress competition; his story “Broken Wing” was nominated for a Pushcart Prize; and he is author of the novel Siege at Ojibwa.

eleena minor writes fiction, drama and, occasionally, commentary. Her fiction has been published in Segue, Quercus Review, edifice WRECKED, Banyan Review, Facets and Chicanovista. Her commentary has appeared in frontera. She has new fiction forthcoming in The Other Half. She is a past first prize recipient of the Chicano/Latino Literary Prize for drama.

Matt Morris, whose work has appeared in such magazines and anthologies as Blue Mesa, DMQ, 88, Hunger Mountain, Manthology, Runes, and Swink, can also be found on the hard wood, showcasing his sweet jumper. Known as "money" from way downtown (see his website at www.misclss.com), he won the 2003 Main Street Rag Poetry Award for his first book, Nearing Narcoma. He is currently shopping around his second volume of poems and isn’t afraid to drive to the hole.

Tom Noe is a professional writer and the editor at Greenlawn Press in South Bend, IN. He has published hundreds of articles, along with two books, The Sixth Day and Into the Lions' Den, and poems in Hillsdale Review, The Rockfinder, andwerve, and Center Journal. He translates Anglo-Saxon and Latin verse into English as a hobby—among many other interests—and is currently finishing a play about the effects of childhood abuse on Frederick the Great. He is genuinely pleased to moderate an irregular workshop for local poets and short-story writers.

Julio Peralta-Paulino is a writer currently at work on several projects. Some of his recent work is featured in Jack Magazine, Metro Seven, and Stylus Poetry Journal.
Elisha Porat, the 1996 winner of Israel’s Prime Minister’s Prize for Literature, an Hebrew poet and writer, has published 21 volumes of fiction and poetry, in Hebrew, since 1973. Porat was born in Kibbutz Ein Hahoresh in 1938. His works have appeared in translation in Israel, the United States, Canada and England. The English translation of his short stories collection *The Messiah of LaGuardia*, (Mosaic Press), was released in 1997. The English translation of his second stories collection *Payback*, was published 2002 by Wind River Press. His new novel, *Episode*, a biographical novel, was just released by Y&H Publishers, Israel, 2006.

Emily Rapp recently received her Masters of Fine Arts degree from the James A. Michener Center for Writers at the University of Texas at Austin where she was a fellow in fiction and poetry. Her work has appeared in *The Clackamas Literary Review*, *Serpentinia*, *StoryQuarterly*, and *The Texas Observer*. She is the recipient of the Robie Macauley Prize for Fiction and was nominated for “Best New American Voices 2003.” She has received grants from the Jentel Arts Foundation, the Mary Roberts Rinehart Foundation, and the Fulbright Foundation. She won first prize for nonfiction in the 2003 Atlantic Monthly Student Writing Competition.

Eve Rifkah is the co-founder and artistic director of Poetry Oasis, Inc., a 501 (c) (3) non-profit poetry organization and editor of *Diner: a journal of poetry*. Poems and/or essays have appeared in *The MacGuffin, 5 AM, Chaffin Journal, Porcupine Press, The Worcester Review, California Quarterly, ReDactions, Jabberwock Review, Southern New Hampshire Literary Journal* and translated into Braille. Her chapbook *At the Leprosarium* won the 2003 Revelever chapbook contest. She received her MFA in Writing from Vermont College and lives with her husband, poet Michael Milligan.

Terese Svoboda’s honors include a nonfiction Pushcart, an O’Henry for the short story, a translation NEH, three NYFAs in poetry and fiction, a NYSCA and a Jerome Foundation grant in video, the John Golden Award in playwriting, the Bobst Prize in fiction and the Iowa Prize in poetry. A UBC and Columbia University graduate, she has taught poetry and fiction at Sarah Lawrence, Williams, the College of William and Mary, the Universities of Hawaii and Miami, Wichita State, San Francisco State, New School and St. Petersburg, Russia. She published four books of poetry, three novels and a book of translations from the Nuer. Her writing has been featured in the *New Yorker, Atlantic, Slate, Bomb, Lit, Columbia, Yale Review* and the *Paris Review*. Her first novel, *Cannibal*, was named one of the best books in print by critic Geoffrey O’Brien. She has also written WET, an opera premiering at Disney Hall in 2005, following a residency at the Rockefeller Foundation’s retreat in Bellagio, Italy. She is also the co-curator of “Between Word and Image” for the Museum of Modern Art. Her videos have been shown at MoMA, MoCA, Ars Electronica, American Film Institute, Cal Arts, the Getty and PBS, and distributed by Women Make Movies and the MacArthur Foundation. Svoboda is currently Writer-in-Residence at Fordham and will be teaching poetry in Kenya for the Summer Literary Seminars over Christmas. *Tin God*, her fourth novel, was just published by the University of Nebraska Press.
Guatam Verma has poems appearing in *Art Times, The Gihon River Review, Folio, Free Verse, Envoi, Poetry Digest, Mangrove, Manifold, Word for/Word, 26, Big Bridge, Diagram, Drunken Boat, Moria, Blaze Vox* and *PomPom Press* among others, and a pair of chapbooks: *Soundings* from Blaze Vox ebooks and *In Ladakh* from Shearsman.

Bryan Walpert’s poems have been published in such literary journals as *AGNI, Crab Orchard Review, Gulf Coast,* and *Tar River Poetry,* as well as in several anthologies. He teaches creative writing at Massey University in Palmeston North, New Zealand.