

SOUTHERN,  
WOMEN'S  
REVIEW

POEMS  
FICTION  
NONFICTION

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SWR



2015 ISSUE



# SOUTHERN WOMEN'S REVIEW

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Dear Reader,

Thank you for downloading the latest issue of SWR!

In addition to our regularly featured Southern Submissions, we hope you will enjoy the SEWING themed poems and stories found throughout this 2015 issue.

Wishing you happiness in all your creative endeavors,

A & H



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## ADA'S ETYMOLOGY

*Regarding the Analytical Engine, 1843*

*by Gabrielle Bates*

Weaver finches I remember as bells  
from childhood, reading about in bed  
their gourd-shaped nests,  
hanging from African trees.

*To weave: Scripture*

From their beaks come the Jacquard Loom

*To braid: To draw a sword*

and one can hear the violence of lovers  
rising like fog in its clicks  
filling a valley, erasing the old shepherd's path.

*Engine: A battering ram in swing*

*To engineer: To seduce*

This is how the breath enters the hands  
of punched cards and cogs—

*Blood: To burst forth suddenly*

*To bloom*

This is how a hem says goodbye to the floor—

*Analytically:*

trades body for body—

*Dissolved*



## AUBAUDE OUTSIDE WITH A RABBIT

*by Gabrielle Bates*

All night you begged for it.  
I whittled my responses  
by tongue—long, thin,

shimmering reds—  
threaded ear's hole  
back to lip, and back

so quietly the clouds dropped  
their arms & let the light fall,  
pale dovegray

piles in our palms up.  
Our belly-backs were ground  
bound and goosey. The twitching fur

hopped so closely we could see its eyes  
were entirely black. I thought  
you pocketed something.

You sneezed.  
It was a little thing.

In your parenthesis, the dandelions lost half their manes  
    & off the rabbit ran on its four key chains,  
splay-flapping the bluff  
    until like the photographer's flashbulb powder  
poof, it was gone,

and only what was taken remained  
feeling forward in the dark.



## **Domestics Buyer, *a Tableaux Vivant***

*by Wendy Vardaman*

She worked retail,  
arranging endcaps like still  
lives: towels and shower  
curtains that paired best hung together  
to attract cynical shoppers hurrying past; table stubs set  
with matching cloth, glassware, unlit  
candles, china plates, coaxed you inside  
a scene in which families would  
want to linger over well-made  
food and pleasant conversation; then, evening ended,  
you could cross the aisle, turn down the 200-thread-  
count but well-priced sheets on a bed accessorized  
with accent pillows  
and coordinating throws,  
and, folding yourself in half,  
relax.



## **My mother reacts to demands for fabric and notions the next day, or another reason I don't have a job**

*by Wendy Vardaman*

Then there was the day I came home  
from 8th grade sewing  
class, required, despite already knowing  
how to sew well enough to make my own  
dress for a school performance two years earlier. (Imagine  
sending every girl to her mother with pattern number and fabric specs, assuming  
they'd return on the appropriate evening  
with a floor-length, empire-waisted cotton gown

complete with ribbons.) So that although  
I desperately wanted to learn woodworking that semester—  
what the boys did—the shop teacher told me point-blank  
that he wasn't having any females messing around dangerous machinery  
in his class, so I would have to take Beginning Sewing. And that's why my mother  
just exploded at "Items to Make a Purse," home at last from a long, late day at work.



## It Is Right and Just to Lose One's Skin

*by Jennifer Schomburg Kanke*

When fishermen can't go to sea, they mend nets  
and when Selkies can't find their skins,  
they train their children to hold tight to their own,  
but my father melted into the snow  
saying "this boy here, he is no more."

They let his gang believe it was drugs,  
that he'd killed a man in Tennessee, that he was bad,  
bad, badder than Old King Cole. That he'd called  
for his pipe and he'd called for his bowl  
and they'd locked him away for three months.

She tried to work him through it alone  
in the bedroom that used to be an attic,  
tell him he was himself and himself  
was quite a self to be. And he said he was trapped  
and he said he'd be missed and he asked to be taken back home.

No matter what she said, the home that comes to all  
never came to him. So she sewed his skin on tight  
and let them take him to shock therapy and Thorazine  
until his mind was so blank and his cupboards so bare  
whatever words they said sounded like *home*.



## Tic Tac Toe

*by L.E.K. Wilson*

Your eyes close. The glare from  
the sun searching the Gulf as it  
heaves. "Do you want some  
sweet tea?" I ask.

"Sweet tea won't fix this," you say.  
Dangling a margin, a gap, a  
distance. From here to there.  
"I know where it stood and

even after the explosion and  
fire and sinking to the sea floor  
I still see the ghost of it—all X's,  
no O's." Your eyes open.

Our silence stands grey.  
Melting with the tide.



## **Two Birds**

*for Mark Strand*

*by Pia Taavila-Borsheim*

Across our northern skies, two birds  
charge and wheel, the smaller sleek  
in hot pursuit. Perhaps the larger

skulked to raid the newborn nest.  
Perhaps a tuft of food its beaked  
desire lured. Whatever the cause

of this flight's rage, they grapple, peck,  
fall and swoop. The chaser nips  
the other's tail, ignores the odds,

defying physics, brave in sheer  
revenge, aloft. I watch them wing  
throughout the morn, then turn to walk

long-rutted fields. Briars, hawthorne  
rise to snag. Their gnarled beauty  
hosts a single feather, black.



## Salem

*by Pia Taavila-Borsheim*

Standing at the great desk, Hawthorne  
must have looked out these windows.

I stand in his treads, place my elbows  
in the wells his created, imagine my pen

flowing with indigo ink. Leather boots.  
Old kid gloves and a feather in my hat.

My poet's shirt flows in gathered folds  
of muslin, open at the neck. Which pages

were kept, which thrown to the fire?  
My black dog lies at my feet, soaks

up the praise I bestow, wants to know  
when we'll descend the lofty steps

to play in the snow. I pose a while longer,  
then snap the leash and whistle.



## Dirt Beneath the Fingernails

*by Nicole Yurcaba*

is a farm girl thing,  
an attribute well-manicured  
city women wouldn't under-  
stand or appreciate.  
City women live severed  
from the soil, foreign  
to the fields, and stay covered in  
Oil of Olay not in tractor grease.  
City women tend to forget  
the farm girl with dirt beneath her fingernails  
who fills their table, so city women vote  
for a multitude of suffocating  
environmental regulations  
so that shopping malls instead  
of livestock can thrive.  
City women inject them-  
selves with drugs during  
childbirth, ignorant to  
the fact that a cow feels  
pain, too, while calving,  
and that the farm girl with  
dirt beneath her finger-  
nails feels even more pain  
when the newborn calf dies  
in her arms.  
City women spend hours  
in salons, prepping for  
first dates and final  
divorces while the farm  
girl with dirt beneath her  
nails spends hours  
bottle-feeding a calf, sac-  
rificing first dates and  
future marriages because,  
after all, "Who'll help  
Daddy on the farm?"  
Yes, dirt beneath the  
fingernails is a farm



girl thing, something  
that sometimes not even  
the most thorough washing  
in the hottest water  
can wash away.



## IF YOU DOUBT

*by Diana Woodcock*

If you doubt,  
go out to where  
Snowy egret stands  
among Swamp lilies.  
Stand silent and still

like it, and listen  
as each frog  
takes up its chant.  
Watch how sun sinks  
into sawgrass marsh,

and the afterglow  
smoothes out the slough's  
rough edges.  
Watch mother alligator  
guarding her young

though they have flung  
themselves far and wide  
just now. Listen  
to Green heron scolding  
them; watch how he leans

toward the dark waters,  
spits out a bit of Pond apple—  
luring a killifish.  
Notice when Snowy egret  
spears a Grass frog,

silence reigns as Creation,  
in unison, awaits the light  
of a new day when nothing  
will kill in Her holy slough  
and sawgrass marsh.





## MILLINERY

by Lynne Barrett

When I was three months out of college, my grandfather drove me in his sports car from New Jersey to North Carolina, where I was to study creative writing, gambling that somehow I would be able to spin a dream of myself into words. Before graduation, my first love and I had broken up, so I was free to go anywhere, an idea that made me dizzy. Because the university's offer of a graduate assistantship with free tuition and a small stipend was the best I got, I let that decide my direction.

I hadn't realized schools in the south started in August until a packet of registration materials arrived, panicking me about finding a place to live. I had a summer job in the library of the women's college I'd gone to, and the librarians sent me to the alumnae office, which gave me the number of an older graduate in Greensboro, who generously checked out ads for rooms to rent. She chose the one she considered safest, she assured me on the phone—a bedroom with kitchen privileges in the home of an old lady who only accepted young women, in a quiet neighborhood walking distance from the campus, since I wouldn't have a car.

On the Saturday before registration, my grandfather had us depart before dawn and drove hell-for-leather so that we turned into the blazing parking lot of a Greensboro motel early in the afternoon. As long as the rooming set-up seemed acceptable, I'd move right in and he'd leave for home early the next morning. After we got cleaned up, we drove into a neighborhood behind a majestic brick Baptist church complex and found the address, a gray house on a corner. As we went up the steps, I remember being crushed by the heat and wondering what I'd gotten myself into.

My landlady had a long German last name. She said to call her Mrs. T, so I'll call her that here. She was short, with permed gray hair. I have little memory of her face. It's her voice that has stayed with me. She spoke with a strong German accent, her tones deep. After my grandfather told her his mother had been born in Alsace, Mrs. T said she'd been a war bride, marrying an American after World War One. Her second husband had been German-American.

At the back of the house, down a little hall off the kitchen, were the two rooms she rented, one belonging to a business student who was at home in Manteo this weekend. My corner room had windows facing the back yard and the side street. There was a single bed with a chenille bedspread, desk, bureau, closet, everything small and tidy. Along the hall the other way was the bathroom my neighbor and I would share. Mrs. T said I'd have two shelves in a kitchen cupboard and a portion of the fridge. I could use the stove top but not the oven unless I got special permission. It was so warm in the kitchen, I couldn't imagine turning on the stove at all.

Mrs. T said roomers were never to use the front door. Ours would be the side door from the kitchen. It was to be kept locked at all times and would be bolted from inside at 11 PM, so I must be in by then or find another place to stay. Rental was month-to-month and she had the right to throw me out if I broke any rules. I gave her my deposit and first month's rent and signed the agreement while my grandfather brought in my suitcases, a stack of new linens, my typewriter, and two boxes of papers and books.

I made sure my key worked in the lock, and then my grandfather and I left to go visit the kind woman who'd found me the room, who served us sweet iced tea by her pool and expressed her doubts about the university, which she considered a hotbed of radical liberalism and drugs. The college she and I had gone to more than a generation apart was a hotbed of radical liberalism and drugs, but of course I didn't say so. She assured my grandfather that with Mrs. T I'd be safe from any nonsense.

My grandfather, who thought of himself as young and modern, with his second wife twenty years younger than he was and his fast car, seemed amused. We went on to the Winn Dixie, where he said Mrs. T reminded him of his mother. My great-grandmother, who'd died when I was ten, had bright red cheeks and a musical trace of an accent. I realized Mrs. T couldn't be too much older than my grandfather—he'd been just a few years too young to serve in World War One—but to me, too, she seemed far older than he was, harsh and strange.

I'd never cooked for myself, so my grandfather chose and bought my supplies, including a full set of spices he said I'd need. At Mrs. T's we unloaded these into my share of the kitchen storage, and then he took me out to dinner. He was unable to



fathom how a nice restaurant couldn't serve us cocktails, eventually eliciting information from the manager about the statewide ban on "liquor by the drink" and where to get a bottle from a state ABC store. After he made sure I could get in the side door with my key, my grandfather left me alone with Mrs. T.

I didn't see her. But, coming out of the bathroom by the illumination of nightlights, I turned the wrong way and touched a swinging door that led into a space that held floor-to-ceiling cupboards, a fridge, and a big freezer. The freezer door was padlocked. I remember wondering what could make Mrs. T fear a harmless roomer like me would steal her food.

Within a week, I had established my routine for enduring the heat. In the daytime, Mrs. T kept the windows and shades down and the AC set to where it just came on sporadically to cut one thin layer off the temperature, so the house was a space of airless, muffled gloom. On its west side, down a hall off the living room, lay Mrs. T's quarters, presumably a bedroom and bath. From outside I could see the dormer window of what might be another room, accessed by stairs I never saw. Much of the time, though, she sat in an upholstered chair in the windowed front nook of the living room, shades down. She had a floor fan aimed at her and her feet up on a hassock as she read or, in the evenings, watched a small t.v. She was so rarely in the kitchen that I wondered if she had another, somewhere beyond the passageway that held the padlocked freezer.

At night, she'd turn the AC off, and I could open my windows and use a small window fan. I'd wet a hand towel and drape it over my chest to help me cool down enough to sleep. Early in the morning, I cracked ice free of the old-fashioned aluminum ice cube trays and filled a tall glass with iced coffee with cream for my breakfast. I took it into my room, where I typed at the small desk, sweating. At nine, when the A.C. came on, I closed the windows, packed up, and walked in the shade of trees till I came out into the sun's full force by the Baptist Church, crossed Friendly Avenue, and entered the near-to-campus neighborhood where kids were living the freer student existence I'd had myself before. In the well-chilled library, I self-consciously studied. I'd never been so up on my schoolwork. At noon, I moved to the English Department. My assistantship made me fiction editor of a venerable literary magazine. In its cool dank windowless office I read submissions. When there were no new ones, I organized the subscription records and read the back issues that filled the metal shelves. For lunch, I ate a tuna salad sandwich I'd packed. Unable to cook, I'd lost the weight I'd gained in college and wanted to lose more because I hated the warmth of my clothing chafing my skin.

Other than the Thursday evening fiction workshop, my classes were in the afternoons, so I walked home by six. There I sat in the shady overgrown back yard reading, eating yogurt or cheese and fruit, until it got too dark and buggy, and then I went inside and told Mrs. T, watching t.v., that I was back, because she liked to bolt the door as soon as she knew the other student and I were in for the night. One evening she said I could watch with her, and because I was lonely, I did. She had me pull up a wicker chair beside her.

She had a color t.v., but most of the time she watched old black and white movies and commented on the women's clothing, especially the hats. She could describe the materials that went into the tilted daffy chapeaux on society dames, or the felt numbers Barbara Stanwick pulled low and tough. I must have asked how she knew so much, because she told me she'd worked in millinery at a famous department store in Washington, D.C. in the late 1920s and the 30s. To her, hats were essential clues to the characters. Gradually I learned their code, the way they covered and revealed, how the right tilt could draw attention to the eyes and away from the ears, how a pointed cap could echo the sauciness of a chin. And, bit by bit, those evenings, she told me stories, all out of order and sometimes repeated with different elaboration, so that I began to assemble a narrative of her life in patches of brightness and shadow.

Her first name was Gertude. She had been called Trude as a girl. She grew up in Koblenz, a very old city at the confluence of the Rhine and the Moselle. Julius Caesar built a bridge there, and there were still Roman fortifications, thick walls people dug into for safety when the First World War reached them. Afterward, she met an American soldier, part of the occupying army, stationed there in the fortress Ehrenbreitstein. She'd been outside, taking care of the younger children, when she met him. His name was Joe. He was from Texas. He spoke no German, she spoke no English. She was seventeen when she defied her father and



married him. Her father disowned her, and she went to America, on a ship out of Antwerp. Their daughter was born in Texas.

After that, Joe was offered some sort of program for veterans, who could own government land if they would clear it and stay on it for two years, and so Joe and Gertrude homesteaded in Florida. When they left, they rented their land to someone else to farm, and Gertrude continued to own it until much later, in the 50s, long after Joe's death, she was offered money for it and sold it. This was a serious mistake, because that land was in Orlando and the buying up was done by speculators who knew Disney World was coming, or possibly it was Walt Disney himself, using a front man. "Just think what it would be worth today," she said. I didn't quite believe this story, but another evening she brought out a black and white photo of her young self in a long pale skirt, a white shirt, and a wide straw hat, holding a gun and smiling with a dead alligator she'd killed strung up beside her.

Looking at the picture, realizing she was then twenty, younger than me, I said, "It must have been exciting," but she shook her head and said, "No, you don't understand, it is terrible, the Schtress." And she touched her knees and showed me her distorted knuckles and said, "That's where this arthritis comes from, all the Schtress."

She said it as if it was a German word, the Schtr deep in her throat, the esssss extended into a hiss, a scary monster of a word. To this day, when people complain of stress, I think the slippery sound is nothing to what Mrs. T suffered, the big Schtress with its mouthful of difficulties that could make her knees ache and knot her hands.

After homesteading, they went on to live in D.C. Joe had a teaching job, and, once their daughter was in school, Gertrude worked in the millinery department of the grand, elegant Garfinkel's. She'd learned fine hand-sewing in Germany as a child. Some hats came in made by designers, but for others, the milliners would take premade buckram and felt forms and adorn them in the fashion of the season, often trimming custom hats to order. She talked of velvet, net, feathers, taffeta, satin, and straw. "You girls," she said, "with your long hair all wild, you don't know what hats are, even."

My hair then fell straight to well below my shoulders. I was proud of it, but with my immersion in old movies, I could see it from her point of view. I'd heard from her, too, the opinion that the university was a place of radicalism, though the story she most often alluded to was a "Happening" back in the 60s during which female art students had bathed naked in some vast tub of spaghetti. I once asked a professor if he remembered this event and he laughed and said the students had to cook batches of spaghetti for days to make enough, so that by the time they got into it, it stank. He said it had been in some kind of oily sauce, but Mrs. T insisted it had been tomato. An article in the newspaper had scandalized all the older residents of the town, the project delivering far more avant-garde shock than the students ever knew.

I could see why Mrs. T padlocked her freezer, forced as she was to take in young studious women, hussies all in her mind, though none were half as daring as she'd been to marry a stranger, an enemy conqueror who didn't speak her language, at seventeen.

Though her father had disowned her, there must have been some channel of connection, perhaps through her mother or a sister, because when she lived in Washington, she knew that times had gotten very bad in Koblenz and sometimes sent home bundles of clothing and a bit of money. It was the Depression in America, too, but she and Joe were all right, they worked and were happy, until Joe died suddenly of a heart attack in the late 1930s. And there she was a widow in her thirties with a child, a German-born woman with a heavy German accent, in a city shadowed by impending war.

Then through some chain of German-American acquaintances a man in need of a wife was found, a German-born widower in North Carolina, like her a naturalized American citizen, a jeweler with his own business, this house, and two young sons. And so she left D.C. and travelled with her daughter by train to North Carolina and married the respectable stranger Frank T and raised his sons. He was a bit older than her and rather short. She was careful in what she said, but I got the impression, though perhaps I dreamed it while listening to her voice and watching black and white movies, that he was stern, and strict with her daughter, who was soon old enough to go off to school. But the boys were all right, they appreciated her, and they got through World War Two, because even though that was a bad time for the jewelry business, everyone needed to keep their watches in good repair.



By October, the heat had mellowed into a golden fall and I'd made a few friends at school and even began to date, though, still heart-sore over my first love, I was not ready to get too involved. I used my padlocked rooming house as an excuse to get home on time. I would describe Mrs. T's strictness, her insistence that we young women roomers must behave.

One day I came home and found her reading a huge book with heavy black lettering, laughing. It was, she said, the journals of Martin Luther. She said he was complaining about his constipation. I said, "Well, he certainly had a lot of stress." And she let out more hearty laughter. I wondered how I could ever write a plausible character, people were so confusing.

As the weather turned cooler, I walked around the city more and discovered a shop with vintage clothing on Spring Garden Street, filled with 30s and 40s dresses, amazingly cheap then. Stacked boxes held elaborate little hats. I tried some on, but they of course looked foolish on me. A big fedora, yes, I could pull that off. But what I bought was a pale yellow satin top, thinking I could wear it with my velvet jacket, on a date. When I showed it to Mrs. T, she fingered the hem and said it was shortened from a nightgown, the kind Jean Harlow wore. And she sighed.

In my one large lecture class, I sat beside a young woman who I saw often adding columns of figures in her notebook. When I asked, she said she was trying to see if she could afford an apartment because after a brief marriage she was living with her parents even though her mother wasn't speaking to her. She was cocktail waitressing and teaching aerobics and going to school part-time. I said I needed to move, too, but was limited because I didn't have a car. She had one, but agreed it would be better if I wasn't dependent on her for rides. We'd have to look within a certain distance of the campus. So I began to plot my leaving. But still I sat with Mrs. T in the evenings, watching movies. I'd learned to recognize Jean Arthur, Myrna Loy, Carole Lombard, and Ida Lupino, and learned, too, to understand the value of a bit of netting to cover desperation and the bravery of tilting your brim and moving on.

Once, late in my time there, Mrs. T told me again that, during the war when she was a girl, her family had burrowed among the fortifications of Koblenz. And this time she said she had one treasure she'd found then and had kept through everything. She told me to stay put in front of the television and went somewhere into the back of her side of the house. I could hear her opening and shutting things, and then she came out with a bundle of cloth and unfurled the layers to reveal a small metal object, about four inches long, shaped rather like a miniature Jean Arthur hat, turned up at the front. It was, she said, a Roman lamp, bronze, nearly two thousand years old. She had carried it with her when she married and crossed the sea.

I thought of its travels, to Texas, Florida, Washington, to this house where she kept it hidden.

"How amazing," I said, "that you still have that, but never went back."

"Oh, I did go back," she said. "Have I not said so?" And, holding the lamp in her gnarled hands, she told me.

After the war, once things settled down, word came of her family, and Mr. and Mrs. T flew home with the three children to show them where they'd come from. At the airport, her family was there to meet them. I imagined the gray misty airfields in the old movies, the propellers and silvery planes, but she, of course, remembered in color. Her relatives had dressed up in their best American clothes, garments she'd sent before the war that they had preserved for a special occasion. Her mother and sister wore her hats and dresses, but the thing that was, she said, "So egstra-ordinary," was that her father had on a suit that had belonged to Joe, from the last bundle she'd sent, just after Joe died, just before she went to North Carolina to marry a jeweler, just before war began in Europe, a suit she recognized immediately because, she told me, it was a particular, an unusual, "a most pe-cu-liarr green."

Her father, willing to see her because she was now married to a German, was wearing the suit of her dead American husband, who he hated, who she loved. What she felt—triumph, horror, and the comical bizarreness of history's twists—I could only imagine through the tone with which she almost sang the word "pe-cu-liarr."

There was just that one visit. Of course it was not something done casually, then, flying across the ocean. But the image of her father in Joe's green suit made me think it ended any need she had to go back home, any doubt about the rightness of her original decision.

There were no stories of the years that followed. Frank T died in 1967 and she became again a widow, but she had the house. Her daughter lived in New Orleans and sometimes, with the grandchildren, visited, though this didn't happen while I was there. Now, in our time of records at your fingertips, I have found censuses and old city directories online, and so have seen that in



the 50s, Frank T owned a business called the Textile Jewelry Company, which makes me wonder whether Mrs. T had some share in what they sold then, fine fabrics and hat supplies, perhaps.

In December I gave notice and deserted her. I never thought of visiting. Nor did she expect me to, I think—it would have been odd and awkward. She entrusted me with her stories knowing I knew no one in her life, just giving herself the pleasure of telling. I've learned that she lived till 1989, having moved to New Orleans at some point to be close to her daughter, the child of Joe. She is buried there. And I've lived in Florida for a long time, but not till now, writing about her, have I realized that the only hat I ever saw her in was the broad-brimmed straw she wore when she killed an alligator.





## DISASTER DETONATES WITH SEQUINS

by *Cindy Small*

Throughout my peculiar childhood, sewing bows on lingerie sets while working in my grandma's pornographic lingerie shop was a royal bitch. Just one of the constant nuisances was how I was always pricking my fingers and bleeding all over the silky material. One summer day, while working full time at the shop because of summer vacation, my hands hurt like hell and I hit on some kind of willed future. I decided I was tired of working in the store, it was time for a change—a job change. Hands blistered and aching, I realized how worthless I felt constantly handling the sexual merchandise. It was time for me to escape.

A few blocks away, on the corner of Canal Street and Bourbon, stood F. W. Woolworth's Department Store. During a typical jungle-hot summer New Orleans Monday, I marched down the sidewalk, swung open the double-glass doors of the department store, and tried to figure out how to become a cashier. In my fantasies, I visualized myself so glamorous and independent, and was giddy at the prospect. It would be so much better than working with Grandma, who thrived on strangers' sexual fantasies. I spotted a tiny, curly-haired, graying woman with thick glasses speaking to a customer in a Cajun accent working behind the post-card counter.

As soon as the customer left, I said, "Excuse me, madam, where is the manager's office?"

"Oh, Cher Babe, dat office be right down dat dere hallway, to da left. You see Miss Inez a sittin' in dere. OK? She da one."

"Thank you, madam." I said, holding my breath and forcing myself; toward the hallway.

'You be lookin fer a job, missy?'

"Yes, ma'am."

"Well, all the daparments have da application fer dose whose wanna work. You wanna work?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Well, dere's a chair. Go sit yerself down and put your name and stuff in the emty places. Den, jes take it down dat dere hallway, to da left to our Miss Inez. She the one yous wan ta see bout a job."

"Thank you, ma'am," I said, walking to the chair. I filled it out as best as I could, putting in the good parts about working in retail, and leaving out the porn.

Standing at the edge of the dark, long hallway in the back of the store, I surprised myself and suddenly felt confident. I mean, what could possibly be worse than a child who spent her days waiting on old men perverts and ringing up crotchless panties at the cash register? Any job here had to be better than that.

An older, heavy-set woman with jet black upswept "hair from a bottle" and clothed in a floral, black and red polyester pantsuit noticed me. She was seated at a large wooden desk. I looked down and saw the pudgiest fingers I'd ever seen. They looked like kosher hot dogs. The area around her was in total disarray, with spools of material, torn fabrics, mismatched dishes, brown boxes of tagged clothing and ribbons of adding machine tape stacked on her desk and spread around the floor like wide noodles.

"May I hep ya?" the woman with hot-dog-looking fingers said.

"Hi, my name is Cindy and I'd like to apply for a job. If you're not busy, that is..." and I thrust my application toward her.

"How old are ya?" she asked, taking the paper from my hands.

"I'm 16," I said lying through my 14-year old teeth. "And I'm very good at retail."

"Well, sit yerself down in dat dere chair over dere and we'll see whatcha got to say for yerself. The name's Miss Inez. Been here 35 years and 4 days."

I made myself look impressed, opening my blue eyes really wide and nodding my head.



"I have a lot of experience working in my family's clothing store and would love to work in your make-up department!" I said with poise, not mentioning my background in clothing was crotchless panties. Sitting close in front of the manager, I could see she had a thick black moustache and hairs sprouting from a nickel-sized mole on her cheek. I visually did a make-over on her. Let's see, I would cut off all that fake black hair frizz on her head, almost making her bald, hang huge, funky earrings on her, shave that man-mustache off, pluck the hairs out of that mole, take my time giving her a fabulous make-up job, put her in jeans add a white starched shirt, and woohoo! Brand new woman!

"Would you be interested in any particular shift? We have a spot in the popcorn department right now, but—if you do well—you could possibly advance to cosmetics in time," the manager, said while looking over my application.

"Sure, any shift, any department," I exclaimed. I'd already lied about my age and was ready to lie about anything else that might land me the job.

"Congratulations, Miss Cindy, and welcome to Woolworth's. We'll start training you Monday mornin'!" Miss Inez excitedly exclaimed.

"Thank you so much...you made my day!" I shouted in a very unrefined manner.

I'd never worked in the "normal" world before. Knowing I'd be working with strangers thrilled me and also scared the living shit out of me. In two days, I would revert from selling pornographic lingerie to popcorn. How great could that possibly be?

My first eight-hour workday was spent with a tall, wiry woman who looked like a giraffe and immediately told me she had forty years of service under her belt as a Woolworth employee. She took her job very seriously as manager of the popcorn department.

"The name's Stella Schneider," she said outstretching her liver-spotted hand with a sturdy handshake. "I was yer age when I started here, and Woolworth's done been real good to me. I got me a good pension. If you do as yer told, and it all works out, before you know it you're getting ready to retire with a pension, jest like me."

"Well, great. You tell me what to do. I'm all ready," I said, a little nervous...I could feel my heart thumping.

"The first thing is I'm gonna show ya is how to fire up dat popcorn machine. People come in early in the mornin', hungry for ma' popcorn. You want it nice and hot, and ready to bag. It's breakfast for some folks, along with a cold Dixie beer."

Miss Stella then pinned ID badges all over my dress, swearing that elevated security was essential for a popcorn maker and warning me that I should not take any badges off until I am on the streetcar going home. Great. Am I gonna look like an idiot boarding a streetcar completely covered in ID badges. That means taking the last seat on the trolley for this freakoid.

The first day, splattering hot grease and popcorn immediately stained my dress. But that was the least of my problems. The cash register intimidated me beyond belief with all the codes, separate numbers for cash, check or credit card. God forbid if the customer would hand me a credit card, my worst nightmare. I gave the popcorn away to customers that had credit cards, rather than go through the confusing process of pushing the right buttons on the cash register. Unexpectedly, about a week later, the giraffe popcorn lady told me I had been summoned by Miss Inez, the personnel manager. I was to report upstairs to the stock room immediately.

"Come in, Cindy," Miss Inez said softly to me. "I don't know how to say this. Do ya' realize what yer wearin' today? You aren't a stripper, are ya?" I looked down at my forest green, backless dress, outlined with yellow sequins in the shape of pineapples and decorated with a red lace hemline. This was my everyday dress. It had been made of leftovers, lingerie remnants in Grandma's store. So, what was the problem I wondered.

"You are showing way too much flesh, my heart. We can't have that. Now, go on home on a two-day suspension and come back wearin' more clothes. You represent F.W. Woolworth and you need to show that you're proud that you are." I wanted to stuff my body behind one of the merchandise shelves, or hide underneath the nicotine-stained cement floor. Since when was I considered provocative? I'd always been told I was a "fat child with a horse-face." The mustached lady-manager who looked like a giraffe should only dream of being so provocative. "I'll be damn if I ever make a glam girl out of her ass!" I thought to myself as



I walked out of Miss Inez' office.

After a few months of being forced to wear low-rent clothing at work, I was quickly promoted to the make-up department. I loved it. Since birth, I had been raised on makeup "how-to's" by my grandma, the hookers who came to our store, and watching my mother put hers on. So this department was a natural for me. Also, since I worked near the French Quarter and I understood that world, I quickly developed a drag queen cult following.

"Take it off...Here's a sponge. Take all that make up off!" I demanded of one of my drag queen favorite customers.

"Hon, please don't make me some iffy looking troll. I don't want to look like a circus freak. Remember, I'm playing Sister Dimension at the Rawhide for the month, so don't make me look as if I want sex in the back seat of a taxi," said Queensie, my drag queen regular.

"Work on the voice, Babydoll, and leave the war paint to me. Now shut up, Missy-Moo!" I always had my way.

With each and every customer, drag queen or not, I made sure that my customers at Woolworth's could feel as if they were sitting at the Estee' Lauder counter while I skillfully used makeup to transform their faces. Then, after their make-up was done, I would lead them toward the wig department and clothing areas, stopping by kitchenware, just in case they needed a knick knack. I was selling the whole fuckin' store to them, and this happened with all my clients! I made sure to recommend every product in the store. At all times, underneath my station I kept packed boxes of spirit gum, eyebrow wax and translucent powder.

My sales climbed higher and higher, making that summer my experience of becoming financially and emotionally independent as well as confident at my position at F. W. Woolworth's. In addition to what I got out of it, I raked in lots of cash for F. W. Woolworths, as my inventory, and a lot of the inventory of the other department, was constantly being sold out. Miss Inez, the personnel manager, grew to LOVE me. I became so successful that I could have worked in the nude and she wouldn't have uttered a word.

That summer became one of my all-time great memories—other than early on when I was mortified by wearing that damn work apparel with its drab, wrap-around school skirts and painfully tight butch penny loafers.

At summer ended, cool weather seeped back into New Orleans and so my schedule changed. I continued to be delivered to the store from school in Mr. Hebert's Yellow Cab until I graduated from Junior High School and went back to sewing bows in Grandma's shop.





## A Lesson in Purple Zeros

by Susan White

When I was seven, I was one of the lucky ones not assigned to Ms. Keith's classroom. So, I did not endure the profoundly sad and awkward experience of watching an orange-haired, doughy teacher cry at her desk because second graders picked on her. Instead, the universe delivered me into the care of an enlightened woman and teacher. And I'll be damned if her name wasn't Mrs. Comfort. This was 1977, when most married women used the I-belong to-a-man label Mrs. so I knew Mrs. Ann Comfort was married, but that didn't stop me from falling in love with her.

She was shaped like a spinning top, and often wore a red and navy pinstriped, stretchy shirt with a shiny belt around her protruding middle. I never saw her bare legs because she wore pants that flared midway over her leather, buckled shoes. Her short black hair shone a purplish tint beneath the fluorescent lights.

Our classroom was right next to the double doors that opened to an expansive, playground surrounded by woods. Mrs. Comfort never deprived me of a recess, which I would fondly recall during 5th grade, when the polyester-clad martinet, Ms. Winn, snatched away nearly all my recesses for talking to friends during class. She even denied me recess for losing a tooth during a standardized test and leaving the classroom to spit out a mouth-full of blood.

But Mrs. Comfort bought a huge, glass aquarium for the box turtle some of us found during recess. We named the turtle Old Dan, after the Redbone Coonhound from *Where the Red Fern Grows*. Mrs. Comfort had just read us the heartbreaking ending, which made me cry so hard tears and snot ran into my mouth.

I loved our classroom. A colorful, circular rug splashed its middle. We worked in ever-changing groups of four at small, round tables. On the blackboard's top right corner, was a cartoon Copy Cat; under it, she wrote words for us to copy on our paper of widely-spaced, red, dotted lines. Above it, an alphabet banner of fancy, cursive letters stretched from wall to wall. All year, we practiced saying the alphabet backwards, a challenge that pulled my brain like taffy. I attempted this feat while taking a bath, riding my bike, waiting to be dismissed from the dinner table, or spinning round and round on my plastic monkey swing. I did as Ms. Comfort suggested: I learned the sequence in clumps of three, with BA—a sheep's sound—left over. Remembering JIH was as hard as snapping my fingers or whistling. So when I cleared that hurdle, I felt like Evel Knievel flying in his motorcycle over fourteen Greyhound buses. After all, my big brother—who was in the 7th grade—couldn't do it. Neither could my parents, and they were teachers!

The day Mrs. Comfort wrote my name on the Alphabet Acrobat Hall of Fame board was better than when I got to be on the Bozo the Clown Show—and that day ranked sky-high in my limited life-experiences. My father and his friend Mr. Edgin drove their daughters to the studio to be in the interactive audience of Nashville, Tennessee's syndicated version of *The Bozo Show*. I had spent hundreds of school mornings sitting on our playroom floor as my mother yanked a stiff-bristled brush through my tangled hair while I watched Bozo the Clown call kids onto the stage to compete in relays, tell riddles, and rap their little knuckles on the Knock-Knock Door for a prize. Being on the set was disappointing at first. From the aluminum bleachers, where we kids and our parents perched, I could see the Knock-Knock door was just a tall piece of cardboard with a printed wood design. A drab warehouse surrounded the small set. But as soon as the bright lights and music came on and Bozo pulled toys from his baggy pants' pockets, I was entranced. And when he asked for a volunteer to tell a riddle, I was ready. After all, Mrs. Comfort gave us a riddle to figure out every Wednesday. I stood and asked, "How do you turn a watermelon into a vegetable? Throw it up and it comes down squash," for which I earned a yellow yoyo. This reward from the gloved hand of Bozo pleased me, but imagine my envy when Mr. Edgin and my father were pulled from the bleachers to compete in the final and most exciting contest: the hippity-hop race. Mr. Edgin had taught Mrs. Bozo in college, and she couldn't pass up the opportunity to get her ex-professor and his friend on big red balls with Mickey Mouse ears for handles. My father violently shook his head and waved his hands to shoo Mrs. Bozo away, but neither she nor the cameras would leave him be. Though I was jealous, it was funny to watch Mr. Edgin—the tallest person I knew—bounce



on a ball with his knees up to his ears. My dad couldn't even hop in a straight line, so he lost.

On the car ride home, Dad forbade me from telling anyone about the show. I thought it was because he lost, but he told me he had done a silly thing as a grown-up and didn't want to be teased. No way; this was a promise I could not keep. I was dying to tell Mrs. Comfort that I had been a TV star and told one of our class riddles. I couldn't keep important things from Mrs. Comfort, and I knew this would make her so proud of me. She might even hug me. I pleaded with Dad, and he said I could talk about everything except his race. Mrs. Comfort was happy for me, but she was more proud of Ellen for taking care of a student from Mrs. Keith's class who had a bloody nose on the playground. Of course, a week later, when our show aired, little kids ran up to my dad screaming they'd seen him on *The Bozo Show*.

Mrs. Comfort turned the back right corner of our classroom into a reading area. Behind a plywood barrier sat wooden shelves with books organized by subject, bright-colored beanbags, and a small table covered in *National Geographic* magazines. Mrs. Comfort loved to show us different cultures and settings. She used the globe to point out where people and animals from the pictures lived. Of course, when Mrs. Comfort was in a different part of the room, Rachel Paschal and I scoured the magazines for pictures of women's bosoms and men's butts. Mrs. Comfort never caught us doing this, but she did catch us eating glue-covered sugar cubes we'd pulled off the igloos students had made for our Alaska discussion. This was a bad day for me; I had destroyed my friends' art just for a taste of sugar.

I hated when Mrs. Comfort was mad at me, when she talked to me privately in a voice that coiled around my heart like barbed wire. After she explained what I had done wrong, I felt sick and wanted to punch myself in the face. But I always woke up the next day determined to be better.

Even today, I am electrified with shame when I recall the time Mrs. Comfort educated me on what being racist meant. I hesitate to share this incident, but I am eternally grateful Mrs. Comfort let me know—nine years after Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, in my home state—how cruel and stupid it was to act like I was better in pale skin than the two students in our class with brown skin. She had caught Rachel and me playing a tag game that consisted of sneaking up behind Leslie and Greg, touching them, then tagging each other. Of course, Leslie and Greg tired of our grubby white hands poking at them. And I'm sure they saw us chasing each other, squealing in fear of getting tagged with the touch of something different.

Mrs. Comfort yanked us into the hallway. She asked us how we'd feel if everyone else in the class had blond hair and they made a game out of pretending we were something bad to touch. She also asked if we thought we were better than Leslie and Greg. Gosh, no. Leslie Legget and I were born the same day in the same hospital. Greg was nice, too. The best at math in the class. She said to stop treating our classmates like something we didn't want to touch. Thirty-seven years later, I still remember standing in the jaundice-colored hallway, staring at the shriveled spider that lay in the corner of the recess doors and our classroom as I learned this lesson.

Then there was the time that Mrs. Comfort had to appease Beatrice Ellis and me. During our morning recess, several of us with older siblings were processing the eviscerating news we'd heard: Santa was a big, fat lie. Of course, we felt superior and mature that we knew something many of our classmates didn't. Beatrice added that she knew something else that wasn't true: Jesus was not God's son and didn't really make miracles happen. I stood in shock as Ellen, the daughter of a theology school professor, debated her. I had to know the truth right away. I told Beatrice we would ask Mrs. Comfort about Jesus. Poor Mrs. Comfort.

She basically gave us a crash course on the split between Jews and Christians. The hardest thing for us to grasp was that we were both right as long as we believed we were right. Yes, I knew that Beatrice was Jewish. That's why she brought dreidels to our class. And that's why that time I ate dinner at her house, the men wore little caps, and they sang a weird song I couldn't understand. I knew I was Christian. That's why I went to church and Sunday school, why I was in the story of Jesus' birth every Christmas Eve, why on Sunday before Easter, Father Shane pinned a tiny cross made of palms to my dress. But it was Mrs. Comfort who explained the different ways some Jews and other Jews—who then became Christians—saw



Jesus. She told us different groups of people believe different things about how the world was made and who looks after it. She said we could believe different things and still be friends. Beatrice and I ran back outside to play four-square.

All of Mrs. Comfort's students were on a mission to be good neighbors because we wanted THE PURPLE ZERO TREAT. She told us that we would receive this magical reward if we went three weeks without complaining about anything, telling on another person, or picking on another person. Each day we refrained from these ugly activities, she drew a purple zero on the wall calendar. She had us figure out that we would need 15 purple zeros in a row (except the weekends, when we could slip up) to earn The Purple Zero Treat. It turns out this was as hard as saying the alphabet backwards. We had to start over many times. But we got better at stopping ourselves from messing up. When Mrs. Comfort had covered ten squares with purple zeros, she reminded us how close we were—coaching us to stay kind and positive. But what propelled us to behave for five more days was Mrs. Comfort's announcement at the end of that memorable day.

She had us sit on the floor where we normally made up stories together, but this time she said she needed to tell us something. Something that wasn't a story. Something that was true. Some of us thought she was going to have a baby. I was in that group because my mom was having a baby any day. Some worried we had blown our chance at The Purple Zero Treat.

She told us how much she loved teaching us and loved Sewanee, but she was moving. I could hardly listen to another word. This was worse than Santa not being real. How could I continue being a student at Sewanee Elementary School without Mrs. Comfort in the building? She said something about her husband getting a job in Memphis, but My mind was somewhere else. This was the worst day of my life. I cried harder than I did when the coonhounds Dan and Ann died. After all, our Ann was going away forever. She would teach other kids, and they would love her. And she would love them. But when summer started, I would never see Mrs. Comfort again.

The next day, on the playground, we all figured out a plan to keep Mrs. Comfort—as if she were a turtle in our terrarium. Beatrice, the smartest person in our class, said Mrs. Comfort was probably moving so she and her husband could make more money. The solution was simple: we needed to give her a bunch of money so she could stay. We swore to bring all the money we could find or steal to school the next day. Sam Clarkson said he'd bring a jar to collect our money.

When we presented our jar of coins—plus a few polished stones Rachel had thrown in—Mrs. Comfort laughed and wiped her eyes with a lipstick-stained Kleenex. We crashed upon her in one embracing wave. She explained that she and her husband had accepted jobs and bought a house; she was definitely moving to Memphis. She wrote her new address under Copy Cat. We all wrote it on our red-lined paper with the reverence of Tibetan monks making mandalas.

Mrs. Comfort had said the best going-away gift we could give her was earning The Purple Zero Treat, which, of course, we did. So on a mid-April afternoon, she took us to a meadow where fairies surely lived. We learned about the different names of flowers and trees and then ate our bag lunches. Suddenly, a man wearing purple tights, a gold shirt with a purple zero on his chest, and a purple cape jumped out from behind a clump of trees. We couldn't really see his face because he wore a black mask. (Now that I know this must have been her husband, I can say that he, too, was willing to do anything for this woman.) He ran around tickling us, and then he disappeared behind the trees. He popped out again—and showered us with pieces of candy. He told us we were good citizens, and Mrs. Comfort beamed. The purple man picked up a case and took out a guitar. Sitting cross-legged on the tickly grass he sang us a song about purple power. Though I can't recall the words, I still consider purple magic.

A week later, our school secretary pulled me out of our lunch-line to tell me my mother had her baby—and it was a girl! We all thought for sure she was having a boy, whom we would call Thomas. But instead of three brothers, I was going to have two brothers and a sister. The best part was that her name was Anne (though my mom insisted on adding an E to the end, even though Mrs. Comfort's name didn't have an E.)

I had hardly taken advantage of summer vacation when I solemnly told my mother I needed her to help me write a letter to Mrs. Comfort. My mother sat on our yellow, reupholstered couch with a pad and pen, while I dictated. When I mentioned the tears I had cried into a medicine bottle, she told me I was being melodramatic, and then she spent a long time explaining what that meant. She did not send the bottle to Mrs. Comfort—as I had requested, but she did let me kiss



the envelope.

Every day, I checked our ivy-covered mailbox. Finally, a letter from Mrs. Comfort arrived. She had written it in words I could read. She missed me, too. For years I kept that letter on my dresser, in the wooden box my mother had carved.

Ann Comfort, wherever you are, I thank you for pushing me and for holding me accountable. I thank you for your stripes and stories. I still try to live my life with a calendar full of purple zeros.



## Gert

by Ann (Adjie) Shirley-Henderson

Sometimes in the 1880s, a railway and a station were placed in the middle of nowhere, totally bypassing the nearest small city. The reasons for this are not clear, but a small town grew up with stores on each side of the station. They are still there to this day, three or four old stores lined up along each side of the tracks. The largest store for a long time was General Merchandise. It was run for many years by the only Jews in town, Hymie and Gert Asimov.

There was a painted reminder on the exposed brick façade on the side of the store that identified this spot on earth as Gen Mdse. A white woman in a print dress and stylized Minnie Mouse shoes from the 1930's was painted on the store side, strolling in a light breeze holding her hat. The painting had been done by a Mr. White, the only artist around. He was supposed to be famous. He showed up in the town one day and indicated an unusual interest in teaching children to paint. Boys could take classes free. He just showed up. He said he came from Hollywood and was in town to take care of his sick mother.

Hymie and Gert Asimov first met on a side street near the Grand Concourse in the South Bronx when they were teenagers, fresh faced and newly arrived from somewhere in Russia where an aftershock of a previous pogrom was always happening. From that moment on, they never left each other. They were married in a store front shul just off the Concourse. No one remembers where any particular store front was. They just sprang up as necessary. The Concourse was Jewish territory in the 20s, with shuls that range from the magnificent to those that just popped up for the occasion.

"There is a joke," said Hymie, "about a guy from the Bronx who is marooned on an island for years. When they found him, he had made two shuls. Why two? Oh, the other is the one I don't go to, he said."

And Gert would giggle and chime in, "I always recall the High Holy days in the South Bronx. The concourse was like a Jewish Easter parade. In the afternoons, the Jews dressed in their finery would walk along the broad avenue showing off their hats and dresses."

The couple migrated South in the hopes of following in the footsteps of their Jewish 'ancestors' and making a department store or just finding any job. It was the early 30's.

Hymie and Gert were damned sure they were from way out of town when they pulled into a store in the south of the US of A just before Chanukah and asked for candles. The only candles available were white birthday candles from Woolworths that they finally bought in desperation.

"Ya'll foreign Jew people oughta go over to the red dot store." directed the guy behind the five and dime store counter.

They could not figure out why they would go to a liquor store for Chanukah candles. They went anyway, thinking perhaps there would be a kosher wine. It was Mr. Goldberg's Hometown Liquor Store and he had a drawer full of Chanukah candles. They lit the candles in the liquor store for the last night, got fed, had some Manischewitz and a decent bed in a room behind the store. It was the last decent bed for miles.

Their car stopped in a little town in Dark Corner because they were low on money and low on gas and worse, out of Jewish families they could stay with as they moved farther and farther into the Bible Belt of the Great Depression. They found a dirt-cheap run-down store that was in its own severe depression and set up housekeeping on the slightly leaning second floor. In its grand heyday, it had been a Belk-Simpson, a thriving store chain. The store had been abandoned rapidly. No one knows why. It just became a forgotten and deteriorating store. What remained was an empty wooden building with a beautiful wide staircase rising up in the middle of the store that formed a natural barrier between white and black people clothes and provided a grand entrance into the dark apartment on the second floor.

The first clothes for sale at Gen Mdse were boxes of stuff shipped by train from Uncle Mort's store on Houston Street. Hymie used the last of their funds to call New York and put ten gallons of gas in the car. Uncle Mort shipped out all



kinds of stuff on the next Silver Meteor out of Penn Station. It was, in fact, stuff that no one in New York wanted, but which could be bought at a small markup in the little town. Uncle Mort placed a box of Chanukah candles in each box for the future. He carefully wrapped a mezuzah and a Seder plate in some scarves.

At some time in the past, the store had been part of a now defunct, colored town, located slightly upwind from town. Because of the store's location, the earliest sales were to "colored people" who were used to shopping there. They paid with eggs, pork and turnip greens. Thus Hymie and Gert became dekoshered and trafed, but they never told anyone this. They would just talk to the customers and tell jokes and stories about growing up on the Grand Concourse.

Twice a year Gert would get on the Meteor in Spartanburg to visit her sister on the Grand Concourse and come back with a new hairdo. Then she would take over the store and Hymie would go to NYC to hang out at Uncle Mort's store in the lower east side, meet with his huge family and arrange shipments of stuff from New York City that still weren't selling there. He would put a sign on Gen. Mdse -- "SALE...Straight from New York City".

Black folks coming to Gen Mdse used the rear entrance marked "COLOURED" over the door that led to a room with men's and women's work clothes folded neatly on tables. The spelling, by the way, reflects the population of mountain folk whose ancestors had arrived here from Scotland. (one of the grade school exercises was declension of 'shant', as in 'I shant go with ya'll tonite')

There had been some attempt to make the single slightly misshaped mannequin in the rear of the store look darker than the ones in the front. She was well dressed, however, with sling back shoes and an imitation fur collar and hat. The white mannequins behind the dirty front windows of Gen Mdse had worn the same clothes for years and the window decorations reflected the holidays, mostly Christmas. Throughout the year, remnants of silver bells hung across the corner of the window.

Gert had her dream. They would form a chain of stores, called perhaps G and H, all over the South and their children would take over and send their children to law and medical school like all good Jews would like to do. They never had children. In the absence of her own, she treated all children as if they were her own.

Early on, she watched as the well-dressed boy and his mother entered the store chatting. The boy had on a new blue suit and wore a man's hat. He reminded Gert of the young orthodox boys on their way to shule on the Concourse and she melted a bit from her usual reserve.

"You have to pick out nice shoes for the wedding," said the mother, "Something that will go well with your suit."

"So that's why you insisted I get into this outfit," he whined. "It's hot and scatchy and I am miserable."

"You must never forget that you have a tradition to carry on in this community," said the mother, "Your father is a minister of the lord!"

Gert measured his feet encased in very holey socks and strongly recommended that he get new socks as well to try on the shoes.

"Well if he must," said the mother, "nothing expensive mind you."

As Gert bent down to double check the size, the child reached over to her head.

"Hey can I see you horns, Gert?" he asked.

"Billy ask politely", said the mother, "and please refer to her as Missus Asimov."

"Jews do not have horns," answered Gert quite a bit more impatiently than she had planned.

"Yes they do," screamed Billy, "My father is a minister of god and he says you have horns. Now let me see them. My mother told me that if I came today for shoes, I could see the horns. Now show me."

Billy looked at his mother and then at Gert. He picked up the shoes and threw them into the Gert's face.

"We're not buying shoes unless I can see the horns. You Jews are gonna go the hell anyway. My daddy says that Jews are the devil and I know that devils have horns." he continued to scream as his mother dragged him, still wearing the unpaid for socks, from the store.

Hymie came with some ice for the swelling on Gert's face. They never told stories of the Grand Concourse again. In fact, they never really spoke to anyone except during a sale. "that will be two ninety nine for the overalls and fifty cents for the shirt."



Forty years later, Hymie died, old and small. You could barely see his head as he hunched over the cash register. For years, all you could see from the aisles was his yarmulke. There was no Jewish cemetery for miles, so Hymie was buried as quickly as possible in a pine box in the town cemetery on the hill. Gert did all the rituals; the bathing, the dressing, the prayers. The town had a memorial service in the basement of the tiny Presbyterian church and then looked after Gert until she finally returned to her beloved Grand Concourse which by this time was a battleground of cultures that were definitely not Jewish.

Gert closed the store and left the little town on July 4th, 1986 with clothes in the store still sitting on the shelves. There were Levis from the 1930s still on the tables and dusty mannequins with 1920s bobs looking over the empty space. A little American flag fluttered in the breeze by the front door. Gert went to California for a facelift with her sister.





## Farm Work

*by Ivy Grimes*

Salted herring, putrid gruel—  
we have a silo-full.

We have igneous neighbors,  
a Swiss mountain dog, too.

If the gourd vine like a virus  
wraps among the crooked-neck squash  
I get blamed. I get blamed  
if the peacocks forget  
to breed. Young robins peel black  
beetle eyes and laugh like coconuts  
dropping onto rocks, and I  
get blamed.

Salted herring, putrid gruel—  
we have two silos-full.



## Hurry

*by Ivy Grimes*

Don't wait until I'm wise.

I sketch you with a spoon

in milk, mornings,  
hundreds of different  
faces, still.

I look for you, pretending  
to look harder for myself,

ear pressed against the garden window  
like a wall, like these birds  
are trashy neighbors.

I don't have to be a swan.

If I'm hale,  
desirous,  
I'm as likely to find it.

I don't have to be a gull,  
white as sores,  
drunk on salt.

I have to be an angel

or bird of prey,  
feathers firecrowns,  
carrying psalters in my claws.

Scan the skies.  
Don't just find me when it's time.



## Anaphase

by Rachel Childs

The first cloudless day in Boston  
when the temperature rises above that sweet  
half hundred mark:

It's like *daybreak in Alabama*<sup>1</sup>.

The serotonic release after eight months  
of labor through the bitter cold.

We carry our anger in our bones.  
Me, in the pangs of my stomach,  
the spasms of my bladder,  
the nausea of  
my eyes, my legs, my chest.

You, in the way you slam  
the door, slam  
the toilet seat, slam  
the microwave, the dishes, the knife  
into the sink, until they shatter  
like the glasses  
(all twelve of them!)  
forming prisms  
in the jaws of the waste bin.

If nostalgia is the answer to anger,  
the chord progression of road trips  
our last hope for balance,  
for reconciliation,  
then *your center has already lost  
it's poles.*<sup>2</sup> And my poles  
are stretched like double-dutch  
and bubble gum. But



in the brief hiccup of *easy*  
*like Sunday morning*<sup>3</sup> in the kitchen,  
May Day windows open,  
me, pouring cinnamon in my coffee  
(like my father would)  
and you, *shooing away*  
*emphatic light*<sup>4</sup>  
with sudsy hands, I find  
that Weezer wasn't lying

when we talked about the romance  
of cleaning fingernails.<sup>5</sup>

1 LANGSTON HUGHES, "DAYBREAK IN ALABAMA"

2 MALACHI BLACK, "TO ONE WAITING TO BE BORN"

3 LIONEL RICHIE, "EASY"

4 JAE CHOI, "MORNING SONG, I"

5 RIVERS CUOMO, "EL SCORCHO"



## The Place of Future Thoughts

*by Holly Day*

A crazy lady who says she's my mother is giving a lecture on dark matter  
to a large group of crazy ladies in the other room, all of which  
claim to be scientists of some sort of another, which worries me because  
I know for a fact they are not scientists. The lady who says she's my mother waves  
a piece of paper in my face, says she's even written a paper  
on the subject, on dark matter  
it's supposed to prove to me that she's serious. She says her other scientist friends  
are very interested in her revelations on the universe, of the origins of myth  
on the paths stretching into the past and future of humanity  
but she won't let me read what she's written.

Upstairs are two children who are supposed to be mine, and I wonder  
how much of the nodding and agreeing that goes in my house  
is simply to placate my own insanities and inanities. The lady who is my mother  
wonders why I don't speak up more in crowds, in groups  
why I don't share my own theories about the relationships between  
the opening of tiny flowers in the morning and the art of trephination  
the sound of lightning and the invention of the wheel  
with more people, how come if she's brave enough to speak her thoughts out loud  
why I keep my own ravings so still and quiet.



## Bird Woman in her Sixties

*by Laura Secord*

Her once high-spiked red hair now shoulder-length silver, she forgoes the heat to pay the mortgage on her acres and piles her truck bed with brush.

Then, in the midst of the coldest of winters, her songbirds arrive—flocks of purple finch, brown-headed nuthatch, indigo bunting, juncos, titmouse, wren, chickadee.

She fills

an antique china bowl with water and secures it on her sill, makes a harbor, sheltered from the cold— a home-built rosemary thicket. Her green glass juicer swells with millet seed.

She builds

past her losses to make an arbor of pecan branches. In the warm sun of her concrete stoop, protected from the chill wind, she mimics their chirping, calls rose-breasted grosbeaks, tosses feed to woodpeckers that hop 'round like chickens, while her tiny migrators nestle and fly.



## Settlement

*by Laura Sullivan*

As our house settled,  
winter would swell  
the front door  
stubbornly shut.  
Once we shaved a sliver  
of wood from the top,  
but the very next front  
blew a bitter draft through  
an obtuse triangle of daylight  
that suddenly opened up  
above the threshold  
between jambs now  
noticeably out of plumb,  
and again we were stuck  
until one of us slipped out  
the back to firmly jimmy  
the door from outside.

Then cracks appeared.  
Not little crow's feet  
but each a lightning bolt  
cleft like a judgment,  
an arbitrary settlement  
of shares, his and mine.



## Cassandra Considers the Dust

*by Kristin Berkey-Abbott*

By day, she talks to her patients  
about the implications of their high  
cholesterol levels, their spikes  
in blood pressure, their weight that creeps  
ever higher. As she prescribes  
medication, she recommends more  
exercise, more vegetables.

She stays late at night to monitor  
the ones who succumb to surgery.  
She has split open chests  
to scoop out the gunk that clogged  
the intricate roads of the interior.  
She has reshaped routes and patched  
together with delicate stitches.

She leaves the computers on the ramparts  
to keep watch. She thinks of monks  
in distant monasteries who chant  
prayers while most of humanity dreams.

She drives home to her dark house.  
Inside, she turns on one dim  
light. She doesn't want to see  
the dust. She can't remember  
the last time the house enjoyed  
a deep cleaning.

She thinks of rising oceans  
and wonders how long  
until the house sinks  
into the sea.  
She leaves the dust  
to its own devices.



## Man in the Fedora

*by Julia Nunnally Duncan*

He stood inside the gym door  
so that we had to pass by him  
as we went in.  
Like a statue he stood and waited.  
Unlike other men,  
he wore a dress suit and fedora,  
which he tipped to the girls,  
and he offered us his hand.  
We called him a greaser,  
maybe meaning geezer,  
though we lumped him in  
with the younger men  
who slicked back their hair like Elvis  
and flirted with us on the bleachers.  
We said amongst ourselves,  
“Don’t let the old greaser grab you.”  
And we girls huddled together  
as we passed through the door,  
knowing he lived in a big house  
across the street from the high school,  
and we would have to see him more  
at these intramural basketball games.

Years later,  
I saw him in town,  
his daughter holding his arm—  
he must have been ninety then—  
and helping him down into her car.  
He glanced my way,  
and by his expression I’d say  
he would have flirted with me still,  
though I was far from the teenage cheerleader  
he’d nodded to in the gym,  
and he was now stooped and frail.  
I felt a twinge of sorrow at his age  
and all the years he’d lost  
and I’d lost, too.



But he still wore the fedora,  
dressed as dapper as ever,  
and something made me hurry to my car—  
a memory of a hand reaching out  
and how he'd tipped his hat  
and looked at me then.  
Again, I wanted to get away.



## American Women Converse on Middle Ages Flab

*Berkeley, California, 2015*

*by Marsha Mathews*

Over platters of burgers and beer-battered rings, friends lament. "If only we lived in the fifteenth century," said Jessica, "when women could savor the feasts: leg of lamb, roast goose. . . ."

"Chocolate mousse," added Ariana.

"Like the women in the Rubens?" asked Roschelle, her hand on her Coke. "Hips spreading, breasts swelling, and tummies, soft round pillows?"

"Their men liked that," said Ariana.

"You got that right." A young student popped her head from the next booth. Textbooks lay spread-eagle across her table. "To be beautiful in the Middle Ages, all you had to do was pluck out your eyelashes, tuck your hair under a scarf, brighten your eyes with belladonna, coat your faces with white lead, and then bleed yourselves daily."



## What Comes from the Earth

*by Sara Baker*

When you kiss the top of my head twice in a row  
or catch my eye and beam at me,  
I know my blood is hot  
for something more than words and rhyme,  
I need not spend my life creating alone.  
The way tomato plants know to sprout yellow buds,  
stretch out their petals and welcome bees,  
or thousands of fireflies meet in the mountains  
each spring to mate, their lights flashing sexy hints  
like Mae West in an evening gown, one leg hitched over the sofa.  
That's not to say that love relies on different sexes;  
even my cats know that much.  
But think, dear, of the nest of twigs in the darkest corner of the porch  
and how the baby birds learned to fly.  
Their mother flew beneath them  
before we buried her in the backyard.



## My Grandmother's Larder

by Sandra Scofield

(Frieda Hambleton, 1906-1983)

Milk, buttermilk, butter, eggs

White bread (home baked)

Cornbread

Saltine crackers; graham crackers

Buttermilk biscuits

Oatmeal

Cheerios, Grape Nuts

Bacon; ham hocks

Bacon grease (for frying potatoes, for gravy)

Chicken (fried; stewed with dumplings)

Pork chops, salt pork

Ground beef (cheap in Texas)

Ham (rarely)

Potatoes, mashed or fried

Macaroni and stewed tomatoes

Deviled eggs, scrambled eggs

Pinto beans

Onions

Head lettuce

Cabbage; sauerkraut; pickles

Apples, bananas

Pies: fruit, custard, lemon, pecan; fruit fried pies

In winter: canned green beans, beets, corn, peaches, tomatoes (some commercial, some home-canned)

In growing season: tomatoes, green beans, ear corn, spring onions, radishes, okra, squash, new potatoes, beets/beet greens, peaches, apricots, melons, pecans (usually Frieda had a garden)

Hershey chocolate bars

My mother and grandmother made a big fuss about my eating when I was a child. I hated milk. They bought boxes of flavor packets--cherry, strawberry, banana, chocolate--and they cajoled me into drinking a glass of milk after school. This was in Wichita Falls, Texas, where I was born. I liked macaroni and potatoes and beans. I ate canned green beans and corn, and fresh corn in summer. I'd eat a few bites of white chicken; I liked to nibble the fat around a pork chop. I loved spaghetti and meatballs, and canned ChiliMac. A favorite sweet snack was iced graham crackers. I would always eat toast. We never had a toaster; toast was prepared under the broiler (for cinnamon toast), or by frying slices of buttered bread in a skillet.

Sometimes I wonder how I grew up on what I ate. I was a thin girl; really I was quite slender until I was forty or so. I learned to eat better when I lived in California in my twenties: the fruits and vegetables were such beautiful mounds of color in the grocery stores, and I learned to steam or stir-fry. Once I married and had a child, I learned plain cooking, a sort of healthier version of my grandmother's, with olive oil, fresh vegetables, and a range of seasoning unheard of in the fifties--curry, cumin,



chiles, fresh Italian herbs, etc. I excelled at crepes, but otherwise have never mastered desserts; my husband is a great pie-maker. A couple times a year I make lemon pie, using my aunt's recipe.

The older my husband and I got, just the two of us to feed, the fussier we became about quality, and the more I experimented with ethnic dishes. Lately, though, I don't care so much about food, though I try to make a nice supper, something simple and tasty. My husband eats breakfast; I don't. He eats leftovers, which pleases me. He eats apples and nuts for lunch. He fasts two days a week. He is healthy, vigorous, and wants to stay that way as long as he can.

I don't have his faith in food. I crave the starchy food of my Texas childhood: beans, pasta with canned tomatoes, potatoes any way at all. I like pickles, coleslaw. I have a sweet tooth. I love Coke. I wish I could have one more apricot fried pie made with my grandmother's fruit.

I noticed by her late sixties that Frieda had severe indigestion. Sometimes she would stop, put her hand on her chest, and wait for her misery to pass. She ate tiny meals. Since my late forties I have suffered the same ailment, which is a lot of the reason I don't take much pleasure in food anymore. I used to have terrible esophageal spasms (like angina), but there are medicines now to prevent that scary pain. She would be surprised to see how some common ailments don't have to plague you anymore. She would be happy that I can do something about a migraine when it hits.

The last year of her life, she didn't eat much of anything other than mashed potatoes. They were easy to make, easy to chew, easy to digest. I can see her point. She didn't really want to eat anymore, nothing in her needed feeding.



## Elegy for John Lennon

by Sheryl Cornett

December 2014

**Advent Greetings, Charlotte, O favored Goddaughter.** Thank you for all your newsy letters about life at sea. I'm always so proud to say to my friends that you are a lieutenant on the USS Kearsarge. I'm glad you like the scarf; it's wonderful to have someone to knit for--and for your email which I got late last night, asking me where I was when John Lennon was shot. And no, I'm not surprised your mother doesn't remember a thing; no two sisters were ever more un-alike than me and her. I think it's cool your ship's book group—imagine! A book club on an aircraft carrier!--is discussing that new Greenberg memoir about Lennon on the anniversary of his death, so I stayed up 'til the wee hours re-reading my old diary. I typed up my fragmented memories down into one long journal. I'm sending it snail mail in this letter, to the ship, and cut and pasted into my reply to your email. Thank you for asking, it was good to remember, and a good way to spend a long winter's night since we're snowed in here. They even closed down Appalachian State so students won't try to get to class on the ice-crusting sidewalks and roads.

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It was also snowing hard that December night when Lennon died, heavy torrents of snow that swirled around the ghostly tree branches. I watched it from the kitchen window in my old walk up apartment. Remember that second floor suite in the ancient colonial on College Avenue? It was like living in a tree house, eye level with the streetlamps lighting up the flakes like feathers flying around in a massive pillow fight. Already, it was almost midnight. I'd been listening to the radio, to Kings' College choir singing Lessons and Carols, and sewing on Christmas presents for friends and co-workers; stitching up lavender sachets plus a set of dinner napkins for my best friend Tasha who shared my cubicle and a daytime soap opera life of Data Entry at the hospital's accounting office.

Since my husband was out of town, I had set up my sewing machine and spread fabric all over the kitchen table. You remember my late husband Dan? You were only in first grade when he died. That picture of him and his guitar in front of the Carolina Theatre? On the fireplace mantle? I took that photo at his last big show.

Anyway, as I always told Dan, somehow being in the kitchen was less lonely when he was on the road with his band. The view into the tree tops kept me company, and this was true that memorable night as well. When the news updates came on at the top of the hour, I'd left the sewing mess where it was, the table a heap of calico divided into piles of finished and unfinished, to start the beef stew simmering in the crock pot overnight and during the next day while I was at work. A welcome home dinner for Dan. I knew it was late and that I should be in bed; seven in the morning would come early enough. But for some reason, I always did this when Dan was away. I stayed up 'til all hours, listened to the radio--probably to put off the bad dreams that haunted me when he was gone--and worked on some sewing project until I couldn't keep my eyes open. Kevin Banks was the host for "Evening Classics" and it was the only time I got to listen to classical music, since our lives were dominated by the folk and rock scenes which more directly fed Dan's career. I'd come to call Kevin "Kev" because we'd spent so many of these late nights together, alone in my kitchen, when Dan traveled with his band. Sometimes you would sleep over with me and keep me company, remember?

I was pushing chunks of shoulder roast around in butter and onions when, after the Kings' singers offered their finale *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*, Kev came on at midnight with his meaty voice and diluted-by-college Southern accent: *weather for Western North Carolina will be sunny and cold tomorrow, high in the mid to upper 20s, winds out of the northwest, bringing us more snow by the week's end.* Then Kev interrupted himself and said: *and this news, just in from our sources at NPR: John Lennon is dead. Oh my God, Kev said right on the air, Lennon is dead?* I remember thinking he must've read the news-feed cold because he sounded like he was gathering his voice, swallowing his shock. Once again official, he continued: *Former Beatles star and world peace advocate John Lennon has been shot dead in front of his New York City apartment building. An unidentified spokeswoman says that Lennon had just gotten out of a town car, and was heading into the building known as The Dakota, when a large man, who had been waiting several hours in the entry alcove of a building across the street, shot John Lennon in the back four times. Police have the man in custody, says one*



witness.

As I stood there, stunned, staring out the window at the snowy trees, I caught a glimpse of myself in the glass of the night windows, in lumpy jeans and an Irish fishing sweater, with spoon frozen in the air, half way between slamming it down and stirring the pot. When I smelled butter burning, I felt as if, in a heartbeat, I'd turned into my mother, your Granny M., and that this was no time for feelings, as she would say. So I snapped to, took the smoking stew off the stove just in time.

John Lennon killed? Dan's hero gone? The rest of the top of the hour news update was a dim hum; I remember thinking I must have heard Kev wrong, but if I hadn't heard wrong, I had to be the one to tell Dan; it had to be me, I guess because I thought it would garner his respect. I knew I'd have to wait to do my grieving when he got home, if it was true. There seemed only one thing to do to be sure, give Kev a call and double check. It seems to me now I must've needed to hear his voice.

I knew the station phone number by heart. How could you not when it was hammered into every pledge drive spiel: 992-9992. I've confessed before I tried many times to win concert tickets that would go to caller number three, or whatever. Once I did win. That night I dialed my old rotary phone--don't forget, this was thirty years ago--with its special extra-long cord that was longer than the kitchen. I put that cord in myself so I could cook and talk to Tasha--ha! I really don't know who I thought I'd get on the other end. The switchboard team I usually got during the thrice annual fundraiser? Maybe it would be a broadcast journalism intern who answered: *Hello, you're caller # 3 and the North Carolina Symphony tickets went to caller #1.* I tucked the receiver between my ear and shoulder to wait out the rings, so my hands were free to transfer the stew pot to its hot plate burner. I began to peel the potatoes and carrots to throw in with it. The phone rang on and on. Neither I nor the station had an answering machine in those days, though some people did, and when the radio resumed its music, the phone clicked.

"WNCB, this is Kevin Banks."

"Hi--Kev, Kevin," I stammered. With something like sudden stage fright, I could not remember for the life of me why I was calling.

"What can I do for you?" his familiar announcer-voice asked.

"I-I'm sorry to call the station, to bother you." My voice was shaking. "But could you tell me if I heard you right? Has John Lennon been shot? I--"

"Yes." Kev's words trembled over the line. "Shot dead." Was it just the phone or was he choking something back? He cleared his throat, and said "They got him to the hospital, and tried to save him, but it was too late."

"I can't believe it." My mind raced ahead to how I would tell Dan, I wanted to be the one to tell him, to share that with him; for us to share it like a little thread to tie us together.

"No one can," Kev said. "Shock. Everybody's in shock."

"I had to check," I said, noting the peeled potatoes in the sink were turning gray. I stood staring at the skinless spuds, though I couldn't think to put them in water.

"Miss--?"

"Hannah. Hannah Vogel."

"Are you a Beatles Fan?" Kev asked me, no longer sounding official.

I could hear a bunch of violins in the background, the transmission on my radio a beat or two behind what came over the phone. "Of course I'm a Beatles fan. Who isn't?"

"Oh, you'd be surprised," Kev said with a sound like sucking his teeth. "There are preachers out there who've scared kids into thinking they're demons." Kev took a loud breath and I heard what sounded like an aspirin bottle rattle near the phone receiver. "Then there are the Lennon-only fans. He's making, was making, such a comeback." I heard a snuffle, pictured Kevin Banks in the studio, sealed in a glass-walled room with switchboards and monitors and turntables and reel-to-reel tape recorders. Maybe he had a beard left over from the seventies and wore a silk shirt open at the throat. "I still can't believe it true," Kevin said. Was he talking to me?

I was about to say I needed to go, needed to call my husband, when Kev abruptly said: "How old are you?" He sounded close, in the next room.

"Twenty," I replied without stopping to think. That was my big problem back then: speaking without thinking, at least



according to Dan and Granny M. *Can't you ever stop to think?* Their voices were one and the same in my head.

"I'm a decade ahead of you," Kev said. I thought, *Dan's same age*. "I was fourteen when the Beatles came on the Ed Sullivan show," Kev went on. "I grew up with them, their music, the mania."

"Lucky you," I said, wanting to ask him more, greedy to gather details of what it was like growing up with the Beatles, of anything Kev might know that I could then offer Dan, a gift to lure my husband home. A way of saying to him *I know some things, too, I do*.

"I have to go," I suddenly felt strange, almost dizzy. "Thank you for—for taking my call."

After a pause Kev said, "Certainly." Then his tone shifted and he sounded official again as I'd heard him any number of times speak to others on the air. "Thank you, Hannah Vogel, for calling WNCB radio."

Soon after we hung up, I heard Kev's voice come on the air and say *that was Respighi's "Adoration of the Magi." Coming up at midnight-thirty: Mozart's "Eine Kliese NactMusic" . . .*

My heart thudded, speeding along with only the thought that I had to call Dan, I had to tell him his icon John Lennon was dead. I can't explain it, but I had to be the one to tell him, to be there even by phone when Dan learned the truth; we had to have the news together. My hands were shaking as I dialed his motel in Nashville, but there was no answer in his room. Where was he? It was late enough; their band's gig had been the night before. I had the itinerary on the fridge. They'd spent the day at a high school giving a songwriting workshop. Next day, they'd be on the road home, ten hours' drive across Tennessee. When I redialed, I asked the front desk clerk did *Mr. Vogel say when he'd be in?* I felt the old panic rise like bile in me. Was he out with Bonnie? Bonnie: that skinny female vocals bitch.

"Lady," the clerk responded impatiently, "this ain't a dormitory. I came on duty at eleven. I don't know nothing." I heard a bell jangle in the background, and a door open to the noise of cars and honking as if an interstate were right out front. The door slammed shut with another jangle.

Without stopping to think, I yelled "Where the hell is he?"

"Listen, lady--"

"I'm sorry." Why was I yelling at this clerk? "Can I leave a message?"

"Sure, sure." I heard the clerk scrambling, I guessed, for paper and pen.

"Please tell Mr. Vogel this: *Call home ASAP. Very Upset at Lennon's death.*

The clerk let out a small noise that sounded like a shriek. "John Lennon? Of the Beatles?" he asked me.

"Yes," I said still shaking, the panic flooding me.

"I'll be damned. Bernie," the clerk said as if I weren't still on the phone. "Bernie, listen up: John Lennon, the ex-Beatle, is dead." Bernie said something I couldn't hear, and the clerk came back on the phone: "Lady, how'd he die?"

"He was shot." I told him the report Kev had read on the radio. "It's all over the news."

"Well I'll be damned," he said again. "Listen," his voice was kinder now, "I'll tape this note to your husband's door myself."

"Thank you." There was a silence before we said goodbye, as if more should be said, but what was there to say? After the motel clerk hung up, I kept the receiver to my ear for a minute listening to the dial tone, tossing into the pot the carrots and graying potatoes, pouring half a bottle of cheap Chianti over the lot. I turned the heat up high to get it all rolling. I thought I'd try sewing some sachets, but I couldn't see to thread the needle.

\*\*\*

I'd been wanting a dog for a while. Dan kept promising soon, soon, but in the two years we'd been married "soon" never came. Because of that night John Lennon died, I got my little Tessa. Remember her? You used to pull her tail when you were little and she didn't even bite you! But that lonely, endless night especially, I longed for a canine so I would have a reason to take a walk, because if any of my neighbors had seen me out walking at that hour, in that blizzard, they would've thought me loony. That wasn't at all likely in a small mountain town like West Jefferson; most everybody would be in bed. Still, you worry what the neighbors will think, or at least I always have. Is it like that on your ship, Char? With everybody in such close quarters?

So, after waiting by the phone for far too long I somehow knew that Dan wouldn't call anytime soon, I bundled up and



went walking anyway, staying to the neighborhood instead of the main streets. I was wearing heavy hiking boots for traction, and they were like kind weights on my feet, pulling loose the anxiety that had knotted in my chest while waiting by the phone. As I walked, I could breathe better and think, and even in the moonless too-quiet snowy ghost town I felt myself relaxing, my arms and legs growing warm and tired. I might even be able to sleep.

I remember walking past the Methodist Church and then the Baptist—you know, across the street from mini, in-town Christmas tree farms?—and wanting to pray, but didn't know then what that meant beyond asking a higher power to give me what I wanted: make him call. So I walked and imagined myself in some other life, in one of those tidy, cozy houses all along College Avenue. A house like the cedar bungalow on the corner with star-shaped string of lights in the front picture window. Even as I pictured a different life, I vowed to keep dialing Dan all night 'til I got him. And if it did take all night, I would call into work sick. Out walking in the ghostly snow, I knew that I would get a dog anyway—you loved Tessa—whether Dan approved or not. I did, too, as soon as the roads cleared that week. Got her from the shelter, before it closed for the holidays.

The streets and white coated spruces and pines seemed deathly still as I walked and thought about John Lennon in a New York City morgue; it was a spooky thing to think as the wind stirred the bells in one of the church towers to a muffled gong. Poor Yoko; what was she doing right now? Did she have a little dog? I knew they had a child, a little boy who was now fatherless, and oh, I felt sad about that. I had heard about John and Yoko's bed-ins back in the sixties and, later on, their radical politics covered in *Time* and *Newsweek* and *People Magazine* when I was a teenager, so I knew about their make love, not war attitude. I'd always envied their not-sappy devotion to each other, how they reunited after separation and near-divorce; that's when they had the baby. A happy family, weathering life's storms. At least that's what it looked like to me. If you're reading Greenberg's memoir, then you know there's some debate about how happy they actually were. But we didn't know much about that then.

Thinking too much about these things, I came upon our town bum. He was drunk. He wandered the streets, as the gossips had it, in mourning for the girl who left him for a Wall Street banker while he was serving in Vietnam. He offered me a swig from his brown bag, which I declined, before telling me off. *What you doing out on a night like this, Miss Hannah?* I said, *Can't sleep, Mr. Ashe.* This was true enough. Just came out for some air. To which he told me, *Well get on home. There's bad spirits out tonight—you can hear them in the wind.*

\*\*\*

Back at the house, I was still unbuttoning my coat when the phone rang, drowning out the radio I'd left on. *Thank you, God. "Hello?"*

Kev's voice. The familiar announcer voice, the rural gentleman's annunciation. "Hannah? This is Kevin Banks, down at WNCB."

Embarrassed, I was back to stammering.

"I know it's late," Kev continued, his words stumbling over each other. "I got your number from the phone book. I tried to reach you earlier. There was no answer." He cleared his throat. "I had to try again. Somehow, I thought it would be okay, not too late. Did you reach your husband?"

I managed to tell Kevin no, I hadn't got hold of Dan, while dropping my coat, gloves, scarf on the kitchen floor, stepping over the long cord to toe off the boots. My heart sped up again. Were my worries about Dan forgotten for the moment? I liked to think so, but who knows. Maybe I just set it aside. Kev was still talking, saying he'd just gotten off duty, the station was on reel-to-reel auto play 'til five, 'til *Morning Edition* and the next shift. He had the weather update that would be read then. He went ahead and read it to me: more snow by day break, gusts of wind up to thirty miles an hour; a winter road advisory from the State Highway Patrol; schools closed.

"Is this why you're calling?" I asked, not sure where my voice came from. I mean, who talks on the phone about the weather to a perfect stranger in the middle of the night? I checked on the stew which bubbled at an alarming pace, not simmering like it was supposed to. The glass lid jumped around on its crockery pot; I'd forgotten to turn the heat down before walking. The meat was already tender, though the gravy hadn't thickened.

"No," Kev said. "I mean yes." A Pause. "I mean no, I really want to see how you're doing with the news. About Lennon."

"Not so good," I heard myself saying.



"Did you have the radio on when I signed off?"

"I went for a walk."

"Then you missed it," his voice quavered a little, he cleared his throat. "I played a tribute, closed out "Evening Classics" with Lennon's *Imagine*."

I heard myself say. "Now that's my favorite tune of his."

"I might catch hell from the station manager tomorrow, but I did it anyway." Kev was talking to me like an old pal.

We talked on--about how hard it was to take in something like this alone, how it was too late to call anybody; most of West Jefferson wouldn't know anything for a few hours still; about how Kev, a rock and roll man at heart, had gotten the "Evening Classics" DJ spot. When he was young, he'd studied classical piano, but gave it up for electric guitar and broke his mother's heart. We talked about what I was doing up so late and why Dan was in Nashville; Kev had seen Dan's band *The Lone Rangers*. They did a lot of area shows. He thought he may have met me once, too, back stage at The Local. Then it clicked, I knew who he was: the guy from the radio station, trying to get a few words from the musicians for an upcoming promo. No beard, no silk shirt. Just a clean cut young man, already balding.

"Would you like some beef stew?" I said, startling myself. *Think before you speak. Can't you ever stop and think?*

Kev blazed over the phone line with a big laugh. "Are you cooking? At this hour?"

"Why not?" I asked. "You're *working*. Look, I'm not trying to cheat on my man, or to pick you up or anything--"

"Nor am I flirting with you--" he said as if he'd rehearsed it.

"But it's after two a.m. and I feel I've been snow bound forever and now John Lennon is dead and what about Yoko and their boy? I'm offering you a portion of the fruits of my insomnia. I don't know why." I thought I must be losing it, really going nuts.

"You don't sound at all crazy, and you are too kind," Kev said. Was he reading my mind about losing it?

I realized I'd better rescue myself before he took me up on my offer. "Look, I know that was weird about the stew. Just forget it."

Kev ignored this. "You don't sound crazy," he said again.

"Well, I don't feel like myself at all."

Or did I? I remember wondering.

"It's grief," he said with authority. "I don't usually call up listeners, either. I don't know what I'm doing. There are crazies who sometimes call the station, saying they feel they know me because of the voice on the radio. They've never even seen me and they want to marry me, these old ladies. At least they sound old." Kev paused here, as if taking a breath. "But you, I can tell you're different."

"It's a small community," I shot back. "Our radio station is right on Main Street; maybe they *do* know you."

I was reeling with the conversation, and before he could ask me anything else I said. "It's late." But we didn't hang up for what seemed like another few minutes. I do remember we talked about how you could love rock and roll and classical, how we owe it to the children of the future to give them both. (And Char, I've always thought you and your friends amazingly open to all kinds of music. Brava, girl). I agreed to drop a Tupperware of stew off at the station the next afternoon; he could heat it up after work or whenever.

After I said goodbye to Kevin Banks, I felt fresh anger that Dan hadn't called but was too tired to cry about it. Instead, I drank a glass of the leftover Chianti and fell asleep on the couch, staring at the ice crystals forming on the inside of the storm windows.

I dreamed bells were ringing, a strange persistent, tinny ringing along with some church bells, door bells, hand bells, and voices trying to talk-talk-talk over them. Then the phone; its ring came to me across the hall from the kitchen. It was bright daylight, the apartment was over-run with blinding midmorning sun reflecting off the snow drifts. The Data Entry office was calling me to take me to task, I was sure; I came alive enough to answer.

"Hannah." It was Dan, he sounded hoarse, like he had a cold. Also relieved, he sounded *relieved*. "I called you earlier, before we got on the road, and got no answer. I called your office, thinking to catch you at work. They're worried. Tasha's been



trying to call since seven.” Hearing his voice, I somehow thought: he knows, he knows about John Lennon, has already cried on Bonnie’s shoulder. In response—unfairly, I admit!—I lit into him: where was he last night, didn’t he get my messages. No, no, he didn’t get them. He was sorry, really sorry, he went to a vigil for Lennon. News had traveled fast in the music world. Nashville was an hour behind NC time, don’t forget; Tennessee is both Eastern and Central time, split right down the middle. Yes, yes, the band was on the road now, but I 40 through the Smokies was closed, from the heavy snow, falling rocks. They would stay the night in Knoxville at Bonnie’s parents; they’d be home the next day, or day after. Depending on what the Department of Transportation and Highway Patrol said, it all depended. I broke down, then, without stopping to think, and told him it had been a scary night, about my ghostly snow walk and needing a dog. I was sorry, I cried into the phone. I don’t think I mentioned Kevin Banks.

I remember hearing what must’ve been tractor trailers zooming by, and realized Dan was calling me from a pay phone. That he was making an effort. But then he was running out of quarters; a car horn honked out several beats. We could talk about it all when he got home, he would call again from the road. You, dear Char, probably find all this pay-phone drama hard to imagine. Life without cell phones!

I had slept the morning away which, as you know, is something for me your insomniac Godmother. When I called the office, they logged it as a sick day. Tasha was going home early. Everybody on the non-essential staff was leaving after lunch, on account of the roads refreezing. She wouldn’t have come to work at all if she didn’t have four-wheel drive. Best to stay home off the roads, stay put, Tasha advised. The ice is terrible, and on top of it the new snow that came down all morning.

After stopping to think long and hard about it, I looked up Banks, Kevin in the big fat Southern Bell phone book. When I called he sounded wide awake and cheerful, though he couldn’t have gotten any more sleep than I had. He walked over to our apartment that afternoon, and I met him in person, and yes he was the slight, starting-to-bald guy, I’d met back stage. We shook hands—awkward!—and we ate the beef stew and listened to his mix tape of Beatles number one hits, many of which were written by Lennon if not McCartney, and a few of their best solo numbers as well. And I’ll tell you one more thing, I’ve never told a soul, not even Tasha, and you mustn’t tell your book club, and it goes without saying you won’t breathe a word to your mother. The last recording on the tape was Imagine and my new friend Kev, leaving aside the steaming bowl of stew, stood up from the kitchen table, still piled up with sewing. He offered his hand to me as if we were at a cotillion. And we danced around in a sort-of waltz, one-two-three steps one way, a little half turn, Kev’s hand pressing the small of my back, one-two-three turn, the other way. Dancing alone in my kitchen, just the two of us, the grief spilled from his eyes and mine, too. We moved again and again to those famous lyrics *you may say I’m a dreamer, but I’m not the only one*.

So there you have it, dear Charlotte: where I was the night John Lennon died.

Love to you from your number one fan, your faithful Godmother, ~Aunt Hannah

P.S. *Your Christmas box is in the mail to the ship.*



## A Conspiracy of Women

by April Bradley

Clarey fell down the narrow stairs of her old house again. Sleep-muddled and distracted by her plans for the morning, she had stood at the landing and met the glare of the sunrise refracted off the snow through the binocular window of the saltbox dormer. When she had reached for the banister, her step faltered and she slipped. She tasted blood in her mouth as she hurled into wood, then plaster, and finally, space. Her heartbeat raced her to the bottom, and just before the back of her head smashed into a riser, she grasped the handrail and halted her progress. Hanging suspended over the pitch, she yelled at her son's bedroom door at the top of the stairs, "Imogen, help! —I'm." She exhaled and said, "Oh." She managed to move her legs around under her body and collapsed against the stairway paneling, her nightgown rucked up around her thighs, displaying scraped knees and bruising shins. She called out again, softer, "Jude?" Splinters coated with lavender beeswax polish tattooed her hands. The polish smelled good enough to eat.

Clarey heard her son's feet hit the floor by his bed, then running. "Mom, are you ok?" Jude hurried toward the landing outside his room and looked down at her. "How bad are you hurt?"

"I'm just bruised up," she said, trying to catch her breath. "Nothing to worry about. I panicked."

Jude stood at the top of the stairs wearing one of Andrew's old Nirvana concert t-shirts. He hitched up the jeans he had slept in and brushed his tangled hair out of his eyes. He looked so much like his Aunt Imogen at the same age, all limbs and angles. So very milk-blond and solemn, his serious concern these days was often mistaken for aloofness. Fourteen's a punishing age.

"Don't move. Did you hurt your head?"

"No, really, I'm fine. I should have been paying better attention." She hiccupped. "Sorry I woke you up. Is the baby asleep?"

"Two's not a baby. She's fine. Not a peep." Jude approached her. "You sure you didn't hit your head again?"

"No no no," she said as he helped her to stand and to navigate the rest of the stairs. He guided her through the dining room into the kitchen to sit at the table.

"Your lip's bleeding. I really think I should go get dad out in the office." He snatched a napkin out of the holder and placed it in her hands. "Here."

"Yeah, it is. Thank you. I think I bit it. I need some tweezers for these splinters." Clarey sighed and dabbed at her lips. "Go ahead and get your father and don't forget socks—and a coat. It's cold as charity out there."

"You always say that. It doesn't matter right now." He found the surgical grade tweezers in the first aid drawer by the dishwasher and placed them on the table.

"Well, you often go out into bad weather wearing the wrong clothes," She said and then stared at a row of foggy windows that spanned the entire southwest wall of the kitchen. "It snowed last night." The frozen salt marshes of the Sound beyond the house to the south stretched away to display an eerie still life.

Jude didn't answer, and Clarey turned and watched him shove his bare feet into a pair of Wellingtons in the mudroom beyond the kitchen and grab a coat off one of the hooks. She winced. Those boots must be so cold. The outer door to the winter porch slammed shut when she said, "Thank you for your help." She watched him lope off in the direction of his father's outbuilding office. She shook her head and went to work on the splinters. She placed each one she removed from her palms and fingertips side-by-side in a line on the napkin with her bloody kisses and felt the draft when her husband strode into the kitchen.

"So, you decided to take the express down the stairs again this morning?" Andrew joked but covered her hands to still them. "Look at me, love." He sat down next to her and withdrew the penlight he always carried.

"I don't need a physical, Andrew," She said and turned away. Sometimes she resented his concern.

"Indulge me. Please."

If she did not give in, he would call for the paramedics. "Fine. Shine your little light." The EMTs would ignore her every protest over the "real" doctor in the family. That she could do without. "I did not hit my head this time. I'm a fine mess of bruises,



though.”

“We’ll deal with each thing one at a time.” He examined Clary and asked her about pain and stiffness. She hurt, of course. She ached all over. “You were right, no concussion. But you may need a couple of stitches on your lip. I’ll do that here.”

She reached for the tweezers, but he snatched them out of reach. “You’ll infect yourself prying those little sticks of wood out of your hands that way. You also said the pain’s beginning to hit you.” He pulled her into his arms, and she permitted him to kiss her neck to soothe her temper. “Want some coffee before I excavate your hands?”

“Yes.” She burrowed into his sweater and inhaled. She missed his smell sometimes. “And some ibuprofen. Lots and lots of it before you stitch me up.” She pulled away from Andrew and sat back down at the table. “It was a frightening and terrible way to wake up.” She shivered. “I’m sorry for pulling you away from your research this morning. I got up early to work on the quilts before the kids woke up and was thinking about the layout of the display.”

Andrew filled the kettle and found the coffee press. “The treads on the stairs are too narrow, Clarey. The risers are too tall and in some cases, uneven. This is the second time too many.”

It had become a concern since the baby had started walking. Andrew’s daughter had no fear of the stairway. She was aware he didn’t care if ripping out the stairs decreased the value of the house. It was an unusual staircase, a bit of whimsy in an otherwise practical farmhouse. It was rare to find a wide spiral staircase with built-in cupboards in a house like theirs. He thought the house was a curse to deal with and really couldn’t give a good goddamn. She adored every astonishing three hundred year-old plank.

“We can try to use as much of the original material as possible or even a reclaimed staircase from the same era.”

“Alright. Let’s look into our options. Maybe Imogen could help, although historical restoration isn’t really her thing. We should probably go with someone local.”

“I’m all about compromise.” Andrew handed her some painkiller and a glass of water. He didn’t notice her raised eyebrow in response to his comment. “The splinters can wait a bit longer until after I suture your lip.” He hesitated, then said, “I didn’t hear you come up to your room last night.”

Clarey ignored Andrew’s question about bed. “What about Jude and Maeve?”

“Jude, no doubt by now, dreams and drools on my sofa in the office, and Mae hasn’t come barreling down—”

“—Maeve,” she interrupted. “Her name is Maeve, after her mother. Not Mae. Mae is my grandmother’s name.”

“—so we can suppose she’s asleep.” Andrew paused and stood with his back to her, his hands braced behind his neck. “You’re the only mother she’s ever known, Clarey, the only one she will know.” He turned to her. “Please, this contempt. She’s bound to pick up on it—”

“—She’s fine. I’m more than an adequate mother. I dote on her. I don’t hold her responsible in any way.” Her hands began to clench and she hissed in pain. “We should have renamed her.”

“Maeve died. She named her daughter, then she died.”

“I’m very much aware of what happened.” Clarey’s accent modulated more distinctly into her native Tennessee vowels. She was very nearly enraged.

“How long, though, will you be angry at me? It’s been two years of furious politeness and little to no intimacy, and, and, I can’t change it. I regret hurting you, but I love our daughter.”

“Your daughter.”

“Our daughter.”

She refused to look at him any longer. She looked down at her palms and let the silence hang between them for a few moments. “I don’t know how long, not much longer, I guess. Just let it be. I don’t want to talk about it anymore.”

“Fine. Ok, I—you’re bleeding again, and you must be cold.” Andrew retrieved a shawl from the mudroom and walked over to Clarey. “In any case, the kids are asleep. I think we may have some peace for a little while.” He lingered and placed the shawl around her shoulders. “It’s a good thing you have Fridays free this term. Soak in the tub, rest. I don’t think you can do any quilting today with your hands wrecked like that.”

“Jude needs to shower and eat breakfast, and Maeve will wake up soon.”



"It shaping up to be a snow day. Jude and I can entertain Maeve." Andrew placed his hands on her shoulders and wrapped the shawl more closely around her. "Jude said you panicked."

"Yes. I frightened Jude, I think." She looked out the windows again. "The strangest thing happened. I called out for his sister, I mean, his aunt."

The kettle whistled. "It's not so strange," Andrew said. He rummaged around in the first aid drawer and found what he needed to work on Clarey. "You and Imogen raised one another, really. That and you spent most of the summer restoring your grandmothers' and great-grandmothers' quilts for the show. I don't think it's strange at all." Andrew turned to his wife and grinned. "Thick as thieves you are."

Andrew nailed it. Despite the men who married into the family, the women were tightly bound. Even when the women burned their hearts out for them, their men remained outsiders to them all. It was an absolute conspiracy of women. And she'd see to it that Maeve was part of it. He came over, and after the prep work, sewed three minute, perfect stitches into her lower lip. After snipping the last thread, he held her face and brushed her lip with his thumb. Clarey knew he wanted to kiss her, wanted to run his tongue along the monofilament knots, taste the iron on her teeth. He liked her best like this, bruised and fragile, more easily compliant and ready to forgive. But it was not enough. She had thousands of stitches resting in her workroom created by the hands of three generations of grief-devoured women. Three little stitches and one dead woman was not enough.

Her husband began to remove the rest of the splinters from her hands.





## Stayin' Alive

by Lois Baer Barr

*Hey, hey, hey  
I got ants in my pants  
And I need to dance  
James Brown*

Spring 1947

Her belly was so big she could barely reach the keys, but she played Peter and the Wolf at the auditorium of Louisville's YMHA. I kicked out the beat. The ballet teacher thought Mom should name me "Tour Jeté."

June, 1951

In a blue satin tutu I tapped to "It's Only a Paper Moon." Courtney School of Dance Recital at the Women's Club on Fourth Street. My mother smiled up at me from the grand piano.

1957-1959

My neighbor and blood sister Linda and I took dance lessons three days a week. Five hours on Saturdays. For lunch we ate greasy hamburgers laden with pickle slices at the Dizzie Whiz. Late afternoons my calves twitched as we waited for the city bus home. Linda changed her name to Nina when she became a professional dancer. Her calves never twitched. Not when we were girls.

1958

Cotillion classes. I learned foxtrot, jitterbug, waltz, and cha-cha-cha at Beth Sholom. One evening the teacher told each girl to put a shoe in a pile; mine was the last chosen. My new patent leather flats had mud in them from hunting crawdads in Beargrass Creek.

1960

I hid in the restrooms at synagogues and country clubs when my dance card wasn't full. I wore scratchy crinolines under purple and pink polyester dresses and a garter belt to hold up sagging stockings.

1962

Master classes at The Courtney's with Madame Mia Slavenska. Madame Slavenska criticized everyone but, she especially deplored my poor leg extension at the barre.

"You are too lazy!" she said and shoved my face onto my outstretched leg.

That summer, after twelve years of study, I quit ballet.

July 1965

We danced until 4 a.m. in a nightclub in Quito, where the boys decided to leave without paying the bill. A week later María Isabel, Josefina and I went to a ball at the Hotel Quito without their parents' permission. Next morning my youngest Ecuadorian sister Margarita said our picture was on the front page of El Comercio. We waited throughout breakfast for Papá Klaus to read the paper and pass it on to us. Terrified, we ran up to the bedroom to look. The picture was so tiny you could barely recognize us.



March 1968

My college roommate Susan and I danced on top of a table at Diplomat's Ball at the Washington Hilton while Jerry Lee Lewis wrecked a piano to "Great Balls of Fire." I heard girls say mean things about me and Susan as I sat in the bathroom stall. In a few weeks Martin Luther King, Jr. would be assassinated in Memphis and there would be National Guards on the streets of D.C. Our classmates fled. We stayed.

May, 1968

Rocky Andromidas and I danced and sang in Georgetown University's Russian ensembles to "Kalinka" and "Katiusha." Then he took me to the Kennedy Center to see the Bolshoi Ballet two nights in a row. The second night we had box seats close to Freddie Franklin. "The director," Rocky whispered, "of American Ballet Theatre." After the performances, we waited in the alley (along with the KGB) to talk with the dancers and get their autographs. Why was I surprised later when Susan told me my old boyfriend Rocky was gay?

September 1968

I danced in a mini skirt at Whiskey in Madrid with horny boys I never saw again. At a guateque I met José Luis who played third division soccer and was studying medicine. I studied *lógica y metafísica*, *picaresca*, *historia* and *novela contemporánea*. José didn't like dancing. Why didn't I study flamenco?

March 3, 1974

Beth Sholom. We jitterbugged, did the Anniversary Waltz and the horah, and the photographer made us so crazy that I wanted to throw our wedding cake at him instead of feeding a forkful to Lew.

June 1978

Lew, dressed in Jockey shorts, danced with newborn Emily in his arms to "Saturday Night Fever." I slumped on the couch, nipples sore from nursing. A neighbor banged on the ceiling. "Stayin' alive. Stayin' alive."

September 1983

We drove Emily fifty miles to Lincoln Mall to Supersweat with Richard Simmons.

1991-1992

We danced at fancy Bar and Bat Mitzvahs.

June 2000

We went to a lesson at Tango Chicago with the Guptas. The tall deep-voiced instructor made us walk in a circle to tango music for an hour. Then he took me in his arms, gripped my back, and guided me around the room. A woman with a red rose in her cleavage instructed my husband Lew. After three hours the regulars arrived. Women in slit skirts and stiletto heels. Men with their hair slicked back. Lew and I were famished and didn't want to eat any more M&Ms from the jars by the Boom Box. We never went back. We never saw the Guptas again.

June 2005

Sitting alone in a darkened movie theatre my feet danced the "Pas de Quatre for Little Swans" as I watched the documentary *Ballets Russes*. Suddenly, on the big screen was my nemesis Madame Mia Slavenska. A chill ran through me and I felt proud that I had taken master classes with a prima ballerina. Then I was delighted to see that Madame Slavenska looked like the witch in *The Wizard of Oz*. Oh dear! She was in a wheelchair. The other surviving members of the troupe, like Freddie Franklin, Mia Slavenska's ex-husband, were still dancing, directing or teaching.



June 2, 2007

We danced to a ten piece band at Emily and Erin's wedding at the Chicago Botanic Gardens. Expensive dancing.

May 2009

Our neighbor Bill bought me a lap dance at the Spearmint Rhino in Vegas. I was doing research for a story. Some people don't believe that.

September 2010

Lew and I took Beginning Tap at the park district with seven women who doted on Lew and an instructor who never taught us a complete routine. That lasted six weeks.

July 23, 2011

Nancy and Stuart, old friends from Louisville, dared me to run inside and check out a small saloon on Highway C in Spring Green, Wisconsin. We wanted a late dinner. My husband joined them in egging me on. So I checked it out. Just pizza and grilled cheese on the menu, but a group of drunken twenty-somethings were having a rousing reunion. After a few tunes on the jukebox, they boogied over to our side of the bar to join me and Nancy as we danced to "Bye Bye Miss American Pie." Lew and Stuart sat at the chipped Formica counter, sipped Miller Lite, watched us twist, shout, boogaloo, skate, and house to everything from "Celebrate" to "Beer Thirty." Lew bought everyone a round of drinks for thirty-seven dollars. We left when bikers arrived.

September, 2011

Three year old Norah started ballet. She stayed close to the door for the first ten minutes. Then she did chassées across the floor and the peanut butter sandwich dance. She learned first position, "Make your heels and toes kiss. Then make a slice of pizza with your feet."

June-August 2013

Rosetta taught us sevillanas at Flamenco Chicago. I wore Happy Dance shoes from Spain with nails in the heels and toes. Felt guilty when another student asked how much they cost.

March, 2014

Zumba class with the master himself in Miami. Beto danced with me twice and in the last routine, maneuvered me to lead the class. Zumba is my Prozac.

*La vida la paso bailando, bailando mejor.*

*I go through life dancing. It's better that way.*

*"Tu bomboncito," Zumba CD, Zin 28*





## Summer 1970, The University of Virginia Opens to Women in the Fall

by Alarie Tennille

Mama calls me a pioneer. I call  
me a student - tagging along  
after my older brother like always,  
ignoring his taunts. *You can't  
come here.* Somehow I knew  
I would.

At thirteen, I fell in love  
with Thomas Jefferson's Rotunda  
and vistas of the Blue Ridge.  
I'm not trying to make history,  
just taking my place in it.

Brave? No, timid and half blind.  
Every stranger and new school  
scares me. That's life.  
I don't know I'll need extra  
courage. That will come later.



## New Words

by Debra Kaufman

High heels click on linoleum,  
a word Mimi learned while watching her mother  
mop the floor this morning.  
She made tiny sandwiches—  
these are called canapés—  
carved radishes into rosebuds,  
and even baked an angel cake.

Pink punch sparkles in a crystal bowl  
over a starched white cloth.  
Mimi is hiding under its folds.  
She is an expert hider.  
Donna brings Tupperware, another new word.  
This party is only for ladies.  
Their dresses are shirtwaists,  
shoes pumps or spikes,  
hairdos page boys, French twists, beehives,  
perfumes Tabu and Chanel Number Five.

Shirley staggers in, stockings sagging:  
*Harry's gone and left me, that son of a bitch.*  
All is quiet for a moment.  
When Lorraine turns on the hi-fi  
Johnny Mathis croons, *It's wonderful, wonderful.*

Ah, the saving aroma of coffee.  
Their voices chirr like starlings in a tree.  
Triangles in the linoleum  
make Mimi want a sandwich.  
A small shadow streaks  
into the woodwork: mouse.  
She is the only one who sees.

Donna shows how small dishes  
nestle into large. *Leftovers,*  
*freshness, fridge, Tupperware!*  
*Listen for the whisper,* and they do.  
There's a rustling, unsnapping of purses.  
Minutes before she drifts off  
Mimi imagines her mother releasing  
the cake from a pristine dish.  
Each bite a small cloud in her mouth.



## During the visit to Bosque Redondo,

*by Ann Herlong-Bodman*

where a century ago  
students' ancestors died, cottonwoods  
splintering by the river, fields turning into stubble,  
a tangle of bushes, dry in places, swampy in others,  
I tell the truth—thousands forced  
to march here, thousands starved here.  
No food. No firewood. No clean water.  
They refuse to leave the bus, say  
bad spirits here, and who can blame them?  
If the truth doesn't matter, what does?  
Let's hope they visit another time, geese circling  
the willows in bright New Mexico sunshine,  
learn the name—The Long Walk—sorrow,  
a deep wound across the desert sand.



## Paying the Congaree Ferryman

*by Austin Lange*

When Jackson our mule died,  
the girls and I had him a ceremony  
before the boys found out  
and dug him a hole.

Using stolen strawberries  
meant for mama's Sunday pie,  
we rubbed the bleeding berries  
in our hands and stained  
our faces with its blush.  
We tucked chicken feathers from a lost bird  
behind our ears  
and began a dance around his body.

Brushing his backside  
with our pigtailed  
to tidy him for the underworld,  
We placed spit shined Stewart pop tops  
over his eyes and  
cursed ourselves for not having  
the time to build a raft  
to send Jackson down properly  
to the river's ferryman.

Instead,  
we fashioned a fuchsia crown  
from a Bradford pear tree branch  
and cut strands  
from his forelock  
for a keepsake box  
a place where we prayed  
time wouldn't allow us to forget his name.



## Pedicure

by Carol L. White

Sun stripes the linoleum beneath the puddle of drool on the waiting room sofa. Meg surveys the room to be certain she's not caught, but everyone's still sleeping except that old couple whose daughter is on the ventilator, and they're not looking, so Meg swipes at the gelatinous mess with the hospital blanket. Dust particles dangle in the rays leaking between the Levelors.

She shoves up from the pillow and frowns at her sister on the opposite couch. Janie's still piled high with blankets, an arm flung wide, weighed to the floor with a multitude of bracelets. Her lipsticked mouth is slack, rumbling with sleep. A sandaled foot juts from the blanket, toenails an exotic orange. Tropical Flame, Meg thinks, as she rubs her eyes.

A volunteer has brewed fresh coffee, and with that aroma people throw off blankets like chunks of ice sliding from glaciers. We're a motley crew, Meg thinks. She pats down her hair and straightens her shirt. When the Pink Lady offers her coffee and donuts she stammers her thanks.

Visiting hour is in ten minutes. Meg shakes Janie awake. Janie glowers, hoists her toiletries bag to her shoulder, and stomps off.

Liz Rudnick, a Somebody with large family in attendance, is perched on an adjacent couch. Her husband had an aortic valve replacement. Liz studies Janie's exit then winks at Meg. Liz's granddaughters, aligned beside her, stare like owls. Meg grimaces at Liz. She pushes herself from the couch and trails her sister down the hall.

Janie hasn't finished her morning ablutions by the time visiting hour arrives and promises to meet Meg later in the MICU. She farts loudly as Meg leaves the bathroom then cackles and yells "Meg!" as if it were Meg who committed such a terrible crime. All this for the benefit of the woman in the stall. The song How do You Solve a Problem Like Maria ricochets through Meg's head.

Janie bursts through the curtained partition of the MICU just as the aid gives their mother's butt a last swipe. "I can do that, Meg! Why didn't you wait for me!" Janie wails.

Meg is supporting Mom's hip and shoulder. "You OK, Mom?" Meg asks. She hopes her voice reveals nothing to the staff about her loathing for the situation that has trapped her here for almost two weeks. Meg is known by many of the medical and nursing staff from her residency years ago and has a reputation to maintain.

She glances at Janie. "What, you want to clean her butt? You can put her make up on. You do that the best anyway," she adds, if only to sound accommodating. Meg sighs and shifts her weight. It astonishes her how quickly she has reassumed the role of long suffering big sister.

"Don't let her near me," Mom mumbles loud enough for Janie to hear. Their mother's been afraid of Janie ever since Janie almost blew up her condo while using cocaine.

Scenes from a Walton's rerun flicker silently from the TV. The Walton's have always been Meg's ideal of a happy family. Erin Walton and her mother are quilting. Meg tries unsuccessfully to picture her mother and sister in the roles of Livy and Erin Walton. Happy family my ass she thinks as she tucks in Mom's blankets.

"Don't let her near me," Mom repeats and points her chin in the air. Her face appears unbreakable to Meg.

Janie sobs, working towards a genuine tantrum.

Dr. Wagoner, an old colleague of Meg's, pokes his head through the curtains. Meg steps forward, hand extended.

Janie leaps between them and beams at him. Tears have dried in black rivulets down her cheeks. A quiver shoots across her lower lip. Meg calls this Janie's Blanche Dubois look. Janie plies Wagoner with questions about their mother's drug addiction then launches into details about Meg's diarrhea when they vacationed in Vienna.

Meg grits her teeth. They're like jackals pissing on her territory. So much easier to be understanding in abstract than when faced with the actuality of one's relatives. She wants to scream into the stethoscope hanging around Wagoner's neck: *I am not my family.*

After summarizing their mother's medical game plan, Wagoner leaves. Janie stalks him to the nurse's station, trailing the scent of Pretty Hot. Meg starts to follow, but instead collapses into a chair. Her mother looks like a sphinx. The ticking of the clock is a metronome for her breathing. Meg feels the room's heaviness sway into her lungs.

"Well maybe this time she'll marry a doctor," her mother says.

Meg springs up and cranes her neck into the unit. Wagoner's penned behind the desk. Janie's gesturing wildly and Wagoner's inching sideways toward the exit. Meg recognizes Wagoner's dance, having engaged in it many times herself. She straightens her shoulders and strolls out to extricate him. Janie's face is fierce, determined, oblivious. She turns to Meg and Wag-



oner makes his escape.

"I like Jim," Janie says. She's applying lip gloss with her pinkie. "I've told him all about Mom, and he's going to take it into account. Even the drugs. I've explained how hard all this is for you, what a control freak you are." Janie scans the nurses' desk and her eyes light on a bank of monitors displaying the telemetry of every patient in the unit. Meg tries to draw her away, but Janie shrugs her off. "Jim just laughed and said he understands family dynamics." She pauses and nods her head emphatically. "He really likes me."

Meg swallows.

The unit clerk, an enormous black woman bears down on them. "Come on, Janie," Meg says, tapping her foot. We're not supposed to be out here."

Janie beams at the unit clerk and engages her in an intense discussion about *Gray's Anatomy*. She continues to stare at the monitor bank, enraptured.

Meg watches herself grab Janie's arm and wonders why she's always such a stick in the mud around people like her sister. Janie spins around and shouts gaily, "Oh lighten up, Meg." The unit clerk nods in sympathy-with Janie-Meg decides.

Back in the MICU waiting room, *Days of Our Lives* is on mute. Liz huddles with her family picking at a late lunch. The old couple's daughter has ARDS-adult respiratory distress syndrome-and cannot be weaned from the ventilator. The old lady leans into her husband. Anxiety hangs in the air like a fog. The next visiting hour is in 15 minutes.

Meg is deep into a book when she becomes aware of a subtle sawing. She doesn't look up, but when she strains her peripheral vision, she sees Janie, foot in hand, vigorously pumicing her bare heel. Janie's eyes are focused, lips pursed. Meg covertly gauges the room, cataloguing wry expressions and gaping mouths. Liz tries to catch her eye but Meg folds back into her book. The day's usual rustlings and murmurings have ceased.

Janie replaces the pumice stone with nail polish remover. She separates her great toe from the other four with her index finger and massages an acetone impregnated cotton ball over the nail. She drops the cotton on the floor and grabs another, tilts it against the mouth of the acetone bottle, then repeats the process until all vestiges of Tropical Flame are gone. Meg wonders if they all know they are sisters.

Liz's granddaughters elbow each other, giggles lapping the room like waves in a pond. Small piles of orange cotton dot the floor.

Janie digs into her overnight bag, and hauls out round brushes and a flat iron before producing several bottles of polish. She holds two of the bottles to the light, decides on one, then crams everything else back into the bag.

Janie scrunches her face and points her chin to the ceiling in a tremulous rapture as she shakes the polish. She tucks clean cotton balls between each toe, and then shakes the polish again. She stares at her feet much as an artist would contemplate a blank canvass, then unscrews the cap and lovingly strokes her toenails dark lavender.

By the time the pedicure is complete, the waiting room has emptied of everyone but Meg, Janie, and the Pink Lady.

"What time is it?"

"Visiting hour started a few minutes ago," Meg says.

"Well, let's go!" Janie's voice is impatient. She springs up.

"You aren't dry." Meg points at Janie's feet, feeling disoriented.

Janie inches her feet into rhinestone flip flops, readjusts the cotton balls between her toes, then shuffles down the hall.

Meg stands to follow, legs trembling.

The Pink Lady hands her a coke.

Janie and Meg peek around the curtain. Mom's scowl matches her twisted covers. Janie and Meg stare at each other, aligned for once in mutual repulsion.

Meg observes the two of them in the mirror over the sink as they make their way to the bed. The corners of her own mouth are pulled down in what looks like permanent dissatisfaction. She straightens her stooped shoulders. On the other hand, Janie's shoulders are thrown back with a grandness of purpose. She towers over Meg with a youthful flamboyance in fashion and styling that contrasts with the cotton balls and one other grooming mishap: Janie's legs have not been shaved. Brown nubs forest them, mid thighs to ankles, which to Meg seem somehow both vulnerable and violent.

The bedside monitor intones a repetitive rhythm that morphs into a staccato alarm whenever their mother becomes restless. She zips her eyes at them, and then focuses on her thumbs, smashing the call light like a teenager with a joy stick at the climax of a hotly disputed video game. Her arms are splashed with green and purple bruises that have coalesced into what looks like some hideous abstract painting.

An extended wail spirals from their mother's lips.

"What's wrong, Mom?" Janie cries, scurrying to her side.

Their mother moans.



Janie pivots from Mom to the curtain and back. "What's the matter?" She asks Meg, eyes huge.

"What's going on, Mom?" Meg sighs, her voice flat, as she pries the call light from her hands.

"Headache," Mom says. "No one brings me anything. Where's my nurse? I need something. And Meg, can't you put some lipstick on? You look washed out."

Meg sighs. "Mom, you are in intensive care because you took too much medication. You almost died. You can have Tylenol but the nurses can't bring Dilaudid every time you have a little headache." Meg is sick of explaining this to Mom for the hundredth time and tired of her own sanctimonious tone.

"Meg, just once I wish you'd get addicted to something, and get off your high horse. You don't know what it's like. I'd rather die than go on like this." Mom squints at Janie for the first time. "You understand, don't you, Jay-Jay?"

Janie smirks at Meg.

Mom swats at the nurse as she pumps up the blood pressure cuff. "That hurts!"

"I have to check your vital signs before I can give you your medication, Mrs. Porter." The nurse looks at Meg and winks. "You do want your medicine?"

Meg has to look away as she feels hilarity bubbling up, and then feels like the worst kind of disloyal daughter.

Mom presses her lips together in a smug little smile as she pinches the Ativan from the medicine cup.

After the nurse leaves, Mom grunts.

"I'll call the nurse back," Meg says.

"Why, what is it?" Janie's voice sails towards hysteria.

"Can't you smell it? She needs cleaning." Meg waves in the direction of Mom's bottom. Meg pokes her head out into the unit, but the staff's attention is engaged in a crisis revolving around bed eleven. Meg doesn't want anything to do with clean up but the guilt she feels over her revulsion for the task trumps her loathing. She rolls up her sleeves and turns back.

"Pee-Ewe!" Janie laughs wildly.

Meg fills a bed pan with soap, warm water, and a washcloth, and sashes it over to the bed. Their mother grunts and strains. Janie has backed into the corner, her laughter morphed into tears.

"Come on Mom, I'm going to turn you now." Meg looks to Janie for help but her watering eyes are glued to Dr. Phil on TV, so Meg rolls Mom on her side and rips apart the Velcro piecing together her diaper. The room is chilled. Goose bumps erupt on Meg's arms.

Meg holds her breath and focuses on a painting on the opposite wall, golden lions chasing zebras across an African plain. A cratered mountain looms in the background. A blazing sun throws the scene into stark relief. It occurs to Meg that the artist has captured the moment right before the zebras are captured and eviscerated. What a strange painting for a hospital, she thinks.

Mom's face contorts in a brief grimace.

"It's OK, Mom," Meg whispers and haltingly strokes Mom's shoulder. She thinks of the power contained the muscled animals. "Mom, I'm going to tilt you back on to this pillow for a while and let you finish, then Janie and I will clean you." She thinks it will do Janie good to be involved with this aspect of their mother's care, but Janie seems frozen in torment.

"I told you, I don't want her near me. You do it." Mom's eyes are half closed, her voice like clotted cream.

Meg can tell the Ativan has kicked in.

Janie sobs, pivots on her bejeweled flip flops, and flees the MICU, trailing cotton balls in her wake.

Meg grips the bedrail until her hands hurt.

Greg, Meg's husband, brings homemade bread and soup to the waiting room for dinner. He wraps Meg in a long hug. "You look like you could use that," he whispers.

Janie interrupts with a drawn out, open mouthed belch, then cracks herself up laughing.

Liz's granddaughters snicker behind pale hands.

Janie plops into a chair next to Liz. "Look at the love birds," she snorts, digging her elbow into Liz's side.

They eat in silence. Meg almost faints with gratitude for the rosemary wafting from the soup.

Janie clears her throat. "I'll take the 8 o'clock visiting hour. You and Greg go see a movie or something." She adds more loudly, "You always get to be with her."

Meg snorts.

Greg shrugs, as if to say, well what's the worst that can happen?

When Meg starts cataloguing in her head all the things that could happen, leaving Janie in charge, she feels a migraine



coming on.

"Go for it!" she says, thinking she's going to have to relinquish control at some point, and it might as well be now. She glances at Liz's family to see if they've noticed her glib tone.

Janie's eyes narrow.

Meg scurries towards the door, feeling like a kid released unexpectedly from school. Then she turns. The waiting room feels cold. It would be like she's abandoning her sister to predators. She wants to apologize to Janie for countless things she can't quite name. But Janie's already distracted, holding forth with Liz's daughter about their mother's overdose.

Later that night, well past visiting hours, the nurses let Meg check on Mom. She's still awake, looking perkier than Meg's seen in days. Her make up's done, nails polished, no doubt Janie's doing. She's watching CNN, a sure sign she's interested in the world again.

"Look at you!" Meg says.

"I feel terrible," Mom says, eyes glued to Piers Morgan.

In the MICU waiting room *So You Think You Can Dance* flashes from the TV. The Pink Lady has gone for the day and Janie is snoring. Meg grabs a pillow and blankets and settles in.

In the early morning Meg returns to the waiting room after a foray to the restroom. Sun stripes Janie's slumbering face. Meg analyzes the beginnings of fine lines around her mouth.

Janie fights the sunlight like she's swatting a mosquito. Her eyes pop open.

Meg looks away, trembling, tears in her throat.

The Pink Lady smiles.

Meg lurches towards the Pink Lady, heart hammering.

"Wait!" Janie says.

Bit by bit, Meg pivots towards her sister.

From her recumbent position, Janie focuses on Meg like she's gone normal inside.

Meg stands still.

Then Janie frowns. In one fluid motion she shoves up, rummages through her bag, and holds aloft the pumice stone and a bottle of ruby polish. "Want a pedicure?"

Liz, awake, smirks. Her granddaughters are silent, watchful.

Meg rubs the back of her neck. Janie's face is wide open like when they were kids and all she wanted was to hang out.

Meg steps towards the couch and positions herself next to her sister. Meg is a zebra on a plain, at once magnificent and vulnerable.

The light in the room is moving, breathing.

The world could break open and anything could happen.

She leans back her head and kicks off her shoes.



## Ice Floes

by Laura Baber

Giant, jagged floes course down the river today. Just yesterday it lay frozen and you'd have thought you could walk across it, from one far edge to the other, the ice holding and supporting you in a journey across itineraries and borders. Maybe you could have, but looking at the river today, the jumbled torrent of dirty, icy chunks, maybe not. Maybe you could have walked from one country to the next, back in the days when you'd have wanted to. Walked between what had been freedom and what had not been. It's harder to tell now, what's free and what isn't; what you'll find on that other, distant shoreline.

I thought it was auspicious that the ice broke today, my birthday, and me being so far from home. I left South Carolina right after that boy died, the one from my high school. I didn't know him well or anything like that, but still the fact of it got under my skin like one of those tropical diseases you read about. Died in the over-wash canal, they said. Which was a fancy way of saying ditch. Died in a ditch by the side of the road, in the middle of the day.

Went in after somebody, they said. It rained too hard and she fell in, got drowned. Neither one came out again. It's not like he was somebody I knew. He wasn't. Just some regular guy. I remembered he had a slack smile and an odd, somewhat sideways haircut. And that he was nice enough. But he was more than that now; now he was somebody. He was the guy who went in and never came out again. There was nobility in that, I thought. This idea of regular, ordinary folks having some kind of untapped pool in them where their better selves swim around. Waiting for a chance to be out in the world. Maybe that was why I finally left, took the gap year. Or maybe I just wanted to be somewhere else.

When I told my friend Cerise about that, the thing with the nobility, she laughed at me. Held out her cigarette, Russian, even though she hated the Russians for what they'd done. She traced circles with her thin wrists in the air, so that the smoke followed her in wispy, disappearing arcs. She was so pale it was like she was transparent, ready to disappear too, in that world of gray, white, snow and ice. She dyed her hair black and her lips bright red. Striking, both of them, against the expanse of white skin spread across her Slavic cheekbones, her translucent eyelids, her high forehead.

"Life is hard," she said, pausing, letting the smoke trail catch up with her hand. "You Americans, with your big, false smiles. You know this is true, that life is hard. But you do not want to know. You want to smile-smile and make it ok. You are liars. Smile-smile liars."

"We're just being friendly," I said, my feelings hurt already and us not even halfway into the conversation.

She stubbed out her smoke and stood, sweeping her dark hair behind her ears. It was a gesture I thought she'd affected. "Friendly doesn't mean shit," she said. "Friendly puts you in the Gulag."

She had this, this fact. Her grandpa'd been put out there somewhere in Siberia by the Russians. She didn't have details, she said, because he didn't talk about it. But still. She could drag that out whenever she wanted. And it served her.

My grandpa'd had it hard too. A farmer, then a sharecropper. A bus driver after that, when the sharecropping wasn't enough. But there wasn't anything in that story that could win an argument, that could be drug out at opportune times. It wasn't hard in a way that could be useful to somebody.

Back in South Carolina when that boy died, I cried all day. I didn't go to the funeral or anything, because I didn't really know him. But sometimes I wished I had. I liked the idea of funerals, of everybody dressing up all in black in honor of somebody and crying together. That seemed to me the right way to do it. I wanted to talk to Cerise about this, about how they handled death here and how it was different from there, but I didn't.

When I'd got into trouble though, it was Cerise who took me in. Cerise who didn't ask questions about how it was I'd found myself locked in that closet. About what that 4 am bus ride had been like, sitting all alone at the depot, freezing cold in the dark and waiting for the first bus to come and take me away. About how it was impossible to stop some things, once they'd started. This was something she'd know about already, that some things can't be stopped. Her grandfather would have taught her that.

Cerise picked me up at the capital center bus depot. She made me a cup of strong, black Russian tea and handed me a strong, black Russian cigarette.

"It will be fine," she pronounced, her sharp accent rolling around the vowels of English, making the words that were as familiar to me as my own skin seem different.

"I didn't mean to," I said, the excuse of a kid even though I wasn't one anymore.

She smoked her cigarette and looked at me, her eyes closing momentarily against the glint of the sun. "Doesn't matter," she said. "You will stay with me. We will buy a chicken."





## Getting Over

*by Valentina Cano*

It is not enough  
to touch and check,  
to open and close  
doors in Morse code.  
It is not enough  
to shake words  
like rain out of your hair.  
You have to wrangle and tame,  
become a sitter to what  
could tear limbs and pare bones.  
Set yourself up for the kill  
with a razorblade laugh  
and chained feet.



## **The small girl at the airport, scolded for her messy room**

*by Judy Ireland*

agrees: things tend toward disorder.  
She straightens her bony shoulders, nods her great head,  
still too big for her body.  
Her mother glares at me; wants to take her disobedient  
child and leave, but it's their gate –  
there's nowhere else to go.

Ice melts in my plastic cup;  
time runs in one direction.  
The universe is cooling down.

Our plane arrives. The jetway extends  
outside the plate glass windows.  
Turned toward the same great equilibrium,  
this child and I distribute our molecules evenly.

As we wear down,  
entropy accumulates.  
Both of us are cooperating.



## Field Trips

by Sara Hughes

The mummy at the museum  
seemed frozen mid-laugh.  
Matthew Musselwhite, tallest in the class,  
rapped the glass and called it Monkey Face.  
We'd never seen a man on display,  
and here was one, our size but hairy.  
His ropy legs were stiff as a stillborn goat's.  
He was terrible in his tininess—  
raisin teeth, eyes sutured like a bad cut.  
*Monkey Face, Monkey Face*, the kids cheered.

I felt a sick I couldn't explain,  
like I did years later at the state fair  
when I paid one dollar to see  
the Amazing Shrunken Woman!  
I entered her tent.  
She rocked in a child-sized chair,  
knitting a potholder and watching  
Wheel of Fortune. No lesson on grace  
in Sunday School had prepared me.  
*Monkey Face, Monkey Face*, I thought.  
For all my staring, she never looked at me.  
On the Midway, carnival rides  
carved the night like electric knives.



## Declamation

*by Jane Blanchard*

At least I got to pick the poem,  
“The House with Nobody in It,”  
from the single volume of verse  
in the bookcase in the den.  
Then I found myself  
directed by someone  
I couldn't get away from,  
rehearsing for something  
I couldn't get out of—  
stepping forward to begin,  
making and maintaining  
effective eye contact,  
enunciating every syllable,  
adding inflections  
and facial expressions  
and even gestures—  
a splendid performance  
surprising the audience,  
excepting my parents,  
who led the applause  
when I found myself  
stepping forward yet again  
for the prize soon pushed  
to the back of the drawer  
of the desk in the room  
that was but wasn't my own.



## WHERE I'M FROM

*by Elizabeth Landrum*

I am from tinker toys  
    from boomerangs  
    and pogo sticks  
I am from Pinky Lee and Jackie Gleason  
    oh, how sweet it is  
I am from cigarettes and whiskey  
(bourbon, please, in a highball glass)  
I am from silver julep cups  
    from thoroughbred horses  
and people who follow your bloodlines  
I am from dogwoods and redbuds  
    from sternwheelers on the river  
from girdles and garters  
(but not to speak of personal things)  
I am from neatly folded napkins and  
    paper ones to save,  
proper shoes, cufflinks, and collar stays  
I am from country club cotillion  
    from swim meets  
    from bridge clubs  
I am from Ringo and Bo Diddley  
from French onion dip on potato chips  
    from fried chicken  
    and a maid named Georgia  
with soft hands and a catching laugh  
who said she'd met Jesus  
(and I believed her)  
I am from kindnesses and hostesses  
    from dinner at six  
and service to people in need  
I am from getting away with sneaking out  
    from fireflies and turtles and frogs  
I am from backyard graveyards  
    from neighborhood faces  
which still recognize mine  
and stories repeated two thousand times.  
That's where I'm from.





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**VALENTINA CANO** is a student of classical singing who spends whatever free time she has either reading or writing. Her works have appeared in numerous publications and her poetry has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Web. Her debut novel, The Rose Master, was published in 2014.

**RACHEL CHILDS** A metro-Atlanta native, her past awards include the Academy of American Poets Award (2012), the Gordon Barber Memorial Poetry Award (2011, 2012), the Eleanor B. North Creative Writing Award (2012) and an AWP Intro. Journals Project nomination for poetry while at Berry College. She currently serves as a developmental editor for English composition textbooks and professional resources at an educational publishing company in Boston.

**SHERYL CORNETT** is from North Carolina. "Elegy for John Lennon," is a short story with a sewing project in the midst of the the plot. Despite the male name in the title, it is women's fiction set in the South and written by a Southerner. Sheryl Cornett teaches writing and literature at North Carolina State University, where she is the 2014-2015 University Honors Program Creative Scholar in Residence. Her poems, stories, and creative non-fiction appear in North Carolina Literary Review, Image, Pembroke Magazine, Mars



Hill Review, and The Independent Weekly among other journals and magazines; and in anthologies such as Global Jane Austen, In a Fine Frenzy: Poets Respond to Shakespeare, and Christmas Stories from the South's Best Writers.

**HOLLY DAY** was born in Hereford, Texas, "The Town Without a Toothache." She and her family currently live in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where she teaches writing classes at the Loft Literary Center. Her published books include the nonfiction books Music Theory for Dummies, Music Composition for Dummies, and Guitar All-in-One for Dummies, and the poetry books "Late-Night Reading for Hardworking Construction Men" (The Moon Publishing) and "The Smell of Snow" (ELJ Publications), while her needlepoints and beadwork have recently appeared on the covers of The Grey Sparrow Journal and QWERTY Magazine.

**JULIA NUNNALLY DUNCAN** Julia has published seven books of poetry and fiction. Her poems have appeared in literary journals and anthologies including North Carolina Literary Review, WNC Woman, Carolina Woman Magazine, and Appalachian Heritage. She is a native of Western North Carolina and has taught English and Southern Culture at her local community college for over three decades. She lives in Marion, NC, with her husband Steve, a woodcarver, and their daughter Annie, who is active in her high school band.

**IVY GRIMES** was born and still lives in Birmingham, Alabama. She has work published in Weave, Eclectica, PANK, DIAGRAM, Dappled Things, and elsewhere. Some of her work can be found at poemchallenges.blogspot.com.

**ANN HERLONG-BODMAN's** work has appeared in numerous print and on-line journals including The Courtland Review, Atlanta Review, South Carolina Review, Cold Mountain Review, Main Street Rag and KaKaLak, anthology of Carolina poetry. She is a former journalist and travel writer who taught journalism at the University of South Carolina and whose full-length poetry manuscript was named runner-up in the 2010 SC Poetry Initiative competition. A featured reader at the Piccolo Spoleto Sundown Poetry Series in Charleston, SC., she lives along the Carolina coast.

**SARA HUGHES** is a recent graduate of Georgia State University, where she completed a PhD in English with a concentration in Poetry. Her poems have been published in Rattle, Reed, Rosebud, The Oklahoma Review, West Trade Review, The Heartland Review, Red Clay Review, Review Americana, The Collapsar, Loose Change, and Thin Air, among others.

**JUDY IRELAND** Born and raised in the Midwest, Judy Ireland's poetry benefits from the verdancy and barefaced authenticity of that working class culture which keeps her work grounded and focused in the ordinary world where extraordinary ideas reside with great subtlety and power. Her first book, Cement Shoes, won the 2013 Sinclair Poetry Prize from Evening Street Press. Her poems have been published in Hotel Amerika, Calyx, Saranac Review, Cold Mountain, and Folio.

**JENNIFER SCHOMBURG KANKE** Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in Prairie Schooner, Pleiades, and The Tampa Review. Although she was raised in Ohio, she currently lives in Florida.

**DEBRA KAUFMAN** is the author of The Next Moment and A Certain Light as well as the chapbooks Family of Strangers, Still Life Burning, and Moon Mirror Whiskey Wind. Her poems have appeared in many literary magazines, including Spoon River Poetry Review, Virginia Quarterly Review, The Greensboro Review, Poetry East, and the North Carolina Literary Review, and anthologies such as The Art and Craft of Poetry and Word and Witness: 100 Years of North Carolina Poetry. Her new collection, Delicate Thefts, is forthcoming from Jacar Press. [www.debrakaufman.info](http://www.debrakaufman.info)

**ELIZABETH LANDRUM, PH.D.**, is a clinical psychologist who was born and raised in Louisville, KY. Her educational pursuits took her to Atlanta, Lexington, Memphis, Chapel Hill, and, finally, back to Louisville where she practiced psychology for 15 years. Then her love for tall trees, snow-capped mountains, and salt water called her to the Pacific Northwest. She is now retired, living with her wife and two dogs on an island in the San Juans, where she is surrounded by towering firs and the ever-changing waters of Puget Sound, finding time to explore her fondness for poetry.

**AUSTIN LANGE** currently lives in Rock Hill, SC, where she is a frequent bird watcher along the Catawba River. Her works have appeared most recently, or are forthcoming, in The South Carolina Review and Nebo. She received her MFA in Creative Writing from Converse College. She has previously served as an assistant poetry editor for online journal, South85.

**MARSHA MATHEWS** is a writer and educator living in Dalton, Georgia. Her most recent book, Hallelujah Voices, presents the voices of a Southwest Virginia congregation as individuals experience pivotal moments in their lives. Marsha's love poems, Sunglow & A Tuft of Nottingham Lace, won the Red Berry Editions 2011 Chapbook Award. Her first book, Northbound Single-Lane (Finishing Line Press, 2010), follows the journey of a woman who finds herself suddenly single, with young children to care for. She leaves home and all she knows to travel north. Marsha's poetry and fiction appears in literary magazines, including Appalachian



Heritage, *Apalachee Quarterly*, *Broad River Review*, *Dash*, *Fourth River*, *Greensboro Review*, *Inkwell Journal*, *Kansas Quarterly*, and *Pembroke*. She serves on the Board of the *Chattanooga Writers Guild*. In 2013, Marsha won the *Orlando Prize for Flash Fiction* (AROH).

**OMNI STUDIO** kindly provided our cover photography. OMNI features four floors and 48,000 sq ft. of character-filled space in the heart of Birmingham, Alabama's revitalized loft district. A former slaughterhouse and meatpacking factory, this fascinating historic building is a collage of textures and backdrops brimming with story. Visit them on the web at <http://www.liesacole.com/omni-studio/>.

**SANDRA SCOFIELD** is the author of seven novels, a memoir (*Occasions of Sin*), and a craft book for writers. This brief essay is from *MYSTERIES OF LOVE AND GRIEF*, forthcoming from Texas Tech University Press in 2015.

**LAURA SECORD** is an MFA candidate in poetry at Sierra Nevada College. She studied literature and Theater at UC Berkeley in the 1970's. She is the author of the poetry collection, *Becoming A Mojo Mamma*, and the play, *Sanapia's Courage Medicine: A Woman Healer's life in Poems*. Her book length poem cycle, *An Art, a Skill a Mystery*, tells the story of two Connecticut women who were persecuted in the witch-hunts of the seventeenth century. Laura blends the life of a writer and performer with a thirty-year career as a Family Nurse Practitioner. She currently provides clinical services to HIV positive patients.

**ANN (ADJIE) SHIRLEY-HENDERSON** is a scientist. She was born and raised in South Carolina and has over two hundred publications in diverse scientific areas, ranging from molecular genetics, forensics, and anthropology to setting standards for environmental controls. Recently, her research has concentrated on a study of the lives and times of émigré female scientists in the 1930s and a book is in progress. She has made numerous public appearances related to science education—CBS, *Good Morning America*, and *National Public Radio*—and been interviewed in the *New Yorker*, *Science News*, *Scientific American*, and *Popular Science*, among others. Her short stories have nothing to do with the credentials above.

**CINDY SMALL** graduated from Tulane University in New Orleans with an undergraduate degree in Journalism and Masters in Historic Preservation Studies. Her story was taken from her manuscript "Family Sequins." Cindy's specialty is humorous dark vignettes about her train wreck of a life. Her vignettes are all about outrageous hair, messy make-up, Tammy Faye lips, eliminating the five o'clock shadow and sparkling personalities. If you're fussy about a bad hair day and pantyhose puts you in a bad mood, her stories of humor mixed with arsenic will make you feel fabulous. In addition to working at UAHuntsville, AL, she also writes a weekly Spotlight column for *The Decatur Daily* in Decatur, AL. Cindy is always on the prowl seeking a literary agent that represents her manuscript of bizarre real life experiences laced with outrageous humor

**LAURA SULLIVAN's** poetry has appeared in *Poverty/Privilege: A Reader for Writers* from Oxford University Press and *Reclaiming Class: Women, Poverty and the Promise of Higher Education in America* from Temple University Press, as well as in *Southern Women's Review*, *The Iowa Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Kalliope* and other journals. Originally from Kentucky, she wrote for newspapers in Central Florida and Alabama before making her home in Tallahassee, Florida. She is a graphic designer.

**PIA TAAVILA-BORSHEIM** grew up in Walled Lake, Michigan, and lives now in Fredericksburg, Virginia. She received a BA and an MA in American Literature from Eastern Michigan University (1977, 1979) and an interdisciplinary PhD (1985) from Michigan State University in English, Sociology, and Philosophy. She teaches literature and creative writing at Gallaudet University in Washington, DC. Gallaudet University Press published her collected poems, *Moon on the Meadow* (1977-2007); Finishing Line Press published her chapbook, *Two Winters* (2011). Her poems have appeared in many journals including: *The Bear River Review*, *Appalachian Heritage*, *The Comstock Review*, *Threepenny Review*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *storySouth*, *The Asheville Poetry Review*, *32 Poems*, *Measure*, *Ibbetson Street Review*, and *The Southern Review*. She is a frequent participant at the *Bear River*, *Sewanee* and *Key West Literary* conferences.

**LILLIS TAYLOR** In 2011, Lillis co-founded *Bib & Tucker Sew-Op* with Woodlawn-native, Ms. Annie Bryant. The *Sew-Op* grew through a successful Kickstarter campaign, a challenge to make nine quilts for a local quilt show, and a challenge to make ten quilts to donate to the Woodlawn YWCA shelter. As of January, 2015, *Bib & Tucker* will have a new home in Woodlawn, where it will be able to continue its mission of promoting sewing and building a cottage industry of textile arts. Lillis always welcomes visitors and Ms. Annie never meets a stranger - if you visit, you're certain to get elbow-deep in whatever project is at hand. To learn more about the *Sew-Op* and its membership, visit [www.bibandtuckersewop.org](http://www.bibandtuckersewop.org) or find them on Facebook.

**ALARIE TENNILLE** ([alariepoet.com](http://alariepoet.com)) serves on the Emeritus Board of *The Writers Place* in Kansas City, Missouri. She's the author of *Running Counterclockwise* and *Spiraling into Control*. Alarie's poems have appeared in numerous journals including *Margie*, *Poetry East*, *I-70 Review*, *Wild Goose Poetry Review* and *Little Balkan's Review*.



**WENDY VARDAMAN** ([wendyvardaman.com](http://wendyvardaman.com), [@wendylvardaman](https://twitter.com/wendylvardaman)) is the author of *Obstructed View*, co-editor of four anthologies, including *Echolocations*, *Poets Map Madison* and *Local Ground(s)—Midwest Poetics*, co-editor of *Verse Wisconsin* ([versewisconsin.org](http://versewisconsin.org)), and co-founder of *Cowfeather Press* ([cowfeatherpress.org](http://cowfeatherpress.org)). One of Madison, Wisconsin's two Poets Laureate (2012–2015), she has three adult children and has never owned a car. A first-generation Midwesterner raised by Southerners, her children still try to correct her pronunciation.

**CAROL L. WHITE** is a nurse practitioner born in Atlanta, currently living in Chattanooga, TN. She has an earlier degree in history and English lit from University of Georgia. In her writing she is drawn to the conflicts families face when dealing with illness.

**SUSAN WHITE** originally from middle Tennessee, received her master's degree from the Bread Loaf School of English and her MFA from Stonecoast. She teaches high school English in Asheville, North Carolina. When she's not grading or writing, Susan enjoys running on the mountain trails with her five dogs. She has published short stories and personal essays in various journals—including *Front Range Review*, *The Labletter*, *Diverse Voices*, *Barely South*, *Pisgah Review*, *The Battered Suitcase*, *Deep South*—and the anthology *Dear John, I Love Jane*.

**L.E.K. WILSON** teaches creative writing at Pepperdine University where she directs the MFA Program. She is currently working on her second poetry collection "And Zero at the Bone": Poems from a Little North of Hollywood and Beyond. Her work has appeared in such publications as the *Oregon Literary Review*, *The Adirondack Review*, the *Journal of Screenwriting*, *Barnwood*, *Arabesques*, *Expressionists*, *The Other Voices International Project Anthology*, *Muscadine Lines*, and *Rose & Thorn*.

Wilson hails from Pensacola, Florida, on the northern Gulf Coast. "Tic Tac Toe" was written in the wake of the Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion, which claimed eleven human lives and did untold damage to the Gulf of Mexico water, marine life, wildlife, wetlands, estuaries, and beach coastline.

**DIANA WOODCOCK'S** first full-length collection, *Swaying on the Elephant's Shoulders*, won the 2010 Vernice Quebodeaux International Poetry Prize for Women. Her five chapbooks include *Desert Ecology: Lessons and Visions*, *Tamed by the Desert*, *In the Shade of the Sidra Tree*, *Mandala*, and *Travels of a Gwai Lo*. Widely published in literary journals, her poems have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net Award. Her most recent award-winning poem, "Music as Scripture," was performed onstage in Lincoln Park, San Francisco in September 2014 by Natica Angilly's Poetic Dance Theater Company at Artists Embassy International's 21st Dancing Poetry Festival. Since receiving an M.F.A. degree in Creative Writing in 2004, she has been teaching literature and writing courses at Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar/School of the Arts. Previously, she spent nearly eight years working in Tibet, Macau, and on the Thai-Cambodian border. A native Virginian, she is a PhD candidate (creative writing/poetry) at Lancaster University.

**NICOLE YURCABA** is a Ukrainian-American writer and internationally-recognized poet currently living and working as an English professor in West Virginia. Her love and dedication to words has propelled her into the arms of such publications as *The Atlanta Review*, *The Bluestone Review*, *Philomathean*, *Outrageous Fortune*, *VoxPoetica*, and many others. Yurcaba's first poetry and photography collection *Backwoods and Back Words* is available through Unbound Content on Amazon.



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