

SOUTHERN
WOMEN'S
REVIEW

POEMS
FICTION
NONFICTION

12

Bust

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Wishing you happiness in all your creative endeavors,

A & H



TABLE OF CONTENTS



POETRY/PROSE

- 6 **RIVER SONG** Marjory Wentworth
- 8 **IN SORROW AND SUNLIGHT** Marjory Wentworth
- 9 **FLIGHT PATTERN** Irene Latham
- 10 **MAYA KNOWS HOW THE DAY WALKS CARRYING HEARTBEATS** Purvi Shah
- 11 **MAYA SHUFFLES PLATES, HOPING TO GENERATE ELECTRICITY** Purvi Shah
- 12 **INTERIOR SCENE WITH FAMILY & SMALL BIRD** Kathleen Brewin Lewis
- 13 **DOGWOOD WINTER** Kathleen Brewin Lewis
- 14 **THE HORSE HAS GOTTEN OUT AGAIN** KMA Sullivan
- 16 **CAREFUL** KMA Sullivan
- 36 **TALKING TO MY MOTHER 776 MILES AWAY** Debra Kaufman
- 37 **BECAUSE WE COULD** Debra Kaufman
- 38 **REFASHIONING RUBY** Tabitha Bozeman
- 40 **WORD GAME** Chivas Sandage
- 42 **BREAK** Valentina Cano
- 43 **MET MY OLD LOVER'S MOTHER AT THE GROCERY STORE** Deana Nantz
- 44 **MOTHER** Cheyenne Taylor
- 45 **US/THEM** Cheyenne Taylor
- 46 **LUNCH AT THE PINK ELEPHANT** Barbara Conrad
- 47 **BAKING CHICKEN PIE WITH MY MOTHER** Barbara Conrad
- 48 **CHOCOLATE PUDDING** Barbara Brooks
- 49 **ROSALIND, LATER** Gail White
- 50 **COMING TO AMERICA** D.A. Spruzen
- 51 **ONE BROTHER DOWN** D.A. Spruzen
- 52 **BUDDHIST PROVERB** Christine Swint
- 53 **TWO STONES, EACH WITH THE LETTER B** Mary Galvin
- 68 **FOLLOWING THE SNOW LEOPARD** Barbara Wiedemann
- 69 **MAGICAL REALISM COMES TO THE DESERT** Barbara Wiedemann
- 70 **32-B** Gail Peck
- 71 **"DEAR CREATURE OF EVENT"** Jane Satterfield
- 72 **MOVING WATER** Julie Hensley

TABLE OF CONTENTS



80 ASSOCIATION TIME AT THE BLUE RIDGE WOMEN'S CORRECTIONAL FACILITY

B.A. Goodjohn

81 HUNGER Agnieszka Stachura

82 THE ARTS IN AMERICA Wendy Vardaman

83 COMPASS POINTS Wendy Vardaman

84 A VISIT WITH THE ALCHEMIST Elizabeth Landrum

86 TIME CAPSULE Laura Sullivan

CREATIVE NONFICTION

18 WITH LAURIE ANDERSON IN THE RICE FIELDS Kerry Madden-Lunsford

24 THE BOOB COLLAGE Marjory Wentworth

28 REVISING THE PAST Carole Poppleton-Schrading

30 WADDLE Michelle Hopf

32 MORTAL Anne Bailey

FICTION

54 NO ONE'S DAUGHTER Carrie Spell

56 NOONTIDE Jacklon Michelle Wright

60 RUMOR, BOOM, BUST. Joanna Grant

62 BOY COME HOME Julia Patt

64 LARGE FLIGHTLESS BIRD Donna Vitucci

76 LOVE YOUR BOSOM; IT'S A HOLYTHING Cindy Small

78 JOURNEY TO YÂNÛ Janie Dempsey Watts



River Song

by Marjory Wentworth

Our house is a river
flowing by gardens of fruit
and lavender butterfly
bushes, magnolia and fig
trees tangled in vines that swirl
beneath moonlight and star shine.

Mountain born, granite fed
river of feathers and glass,
where light gathers each morning
and evening as birdsong braids
the air into one green song
humming like a heartbeat.

Passed astonished snow swept
islands and the city
rising at the edge of the sea,
the river rushes in a fury
under the great steel buildings
glowing like ripe volcanoes

in the blue black night. City
of music and light, criss-crossed
with train tracks and avenues
bearing multitudes. City of smoke.
City of dreams collecting
like seeds and scattered on water.

Our house is a river
where books have gathered
in great piles along the banks
before the flood and after,
dog leaved, molded and torn,
tear stained and treasured.



We crossed a bridge and returned
wounded and singing, carrying
butterflies and lightning
in our pockets, children
strapped to our backs, water
rushing beneath us
like an unwritten story.



In Sorrow and Sunlight

in memory of Carrie Levenson-Wahl

by Marjory Wentworth

On her last day, I was driving south
Past fields of corn and cotton; miles of green
Sloped hills where horses roamed between small towns,
Like memories of places I'd never been.

Once, I drove across mountains to see her.
Horses grazed in the fog filled fields beside
her house, moisture clinging to their fur—
like strings of tiny stars shining in sunlight.

In my dreams she lives, within the world she loved.
Notes ringing the morning air like tears—
Her voice tinged with sorrow and sun,
The bell song of her leaving filling the spheres.

And this is what I hear calling in the night,
When stars remind me of her joy and her bright
Suffering, my friend singing in the gathering light.



Flight Pattern

by Irene Latham

Sometimes
I burn feathers

just to see
the smoke

signaling
an end.

History bleeds
its persistent sap

on the tarmac
I hoped to keep

unmarred.
The ditch

along the runway
sloshes against

its icy crust,
threatening spring

under its breath.
My love,

how many times
must you circle

when I would
have you land?



Maya knows how the day walks carrying heartbeats

by Purvi Shah

Resurrect flesh

as rivers:

Ask who unwombed

you. *Question* your own

creator. Learn

the rules. Understand mystique
as *beyond.*

Flicker *empirical.* Collect

signatures.

Drum these selves

in dust & *borders of wars.*

Speak through boom as if you *have a choice.*



Maya shuffles plates, hoping to generate electricity

by Purvi Shah

She despairs that lukewarm icebox, rank of singed
wood, that thick of kerosene. She wants to drink

shade. She wants to hold the substance
of your hand. *She wants not*

to want.

Sometimes rotation is progress, sometimes *the illusion*
of progress – revolution *free of charge*. Maya

is tired of illusions. *She wants to eat*.

She wants to generate. So Maya serves

variables, *quirky* & new: All
we have is today. [Today is code

for this moment.] All this moment
has is *memory of your voice*, a lapsed

proton (such potential). Ah, this world

– *lingering at beauty's edge* for one
strong force

to break air from

gravity, time

from space/collide shadow & self

manifest

—*charge*.



Interior Scene with Family & Small Bird

by Kathleen Brewin Lewis

Once when you and your brother were small,
we filled a plastic feeder with sweet red water.
I climbed the stepladder, hung it
outside the dining room window.
You weren't sure you'd seen a hummingbird before,
so your brother described one to you:
How tiny it was, how quick. How its wings
beat so fast, they disappeared.

We were vigilant at mealtimes, looked up at every bite.
Then one supper, after we'd said grace and you were
telling your dad about your day—the books you'd brought home
from the preschool library, the classroom hedgehog—
one appeared, fairy-like, treading air beside the feeder.

You sucked in your breath;
the four of us exchanged sideways glances.
Everybody freeze, I whispered,
laying one finger across my lips.
But of course, we didn't.



Dogwood Winter

by Kathleen Brewin Lewis

Three days after Easter,
and the temperature
has slipped, fallen.

Flakes of flowering cherry
swirl with pale petals
of unseasonable snow.

A bald yellow egg
from the weekend's hunt
lies unfound on the bitter ground.

We pull our sweaters
tight around us, hope
the hyacinths won't freeze, wait

for spring to strong-arm winter,
roll it back,
where it belongs.



the horse has gotten out again

by KMA Sullivan

pushed through the wood
that pretends to hold him
he chews the chickweed
outside my window

his head fills the glass
he is content
to drag his hoof across roots
when he carries me
under the lowest limb
so I have to choose between ducking
and a smack in the face

I learned early to sleep in the cold
pine burns hot and fast in the stove
but can't bend around corners
no warmth found where I slept

many mornings found me
staring out the window
watching my father's taillight recede
long before thrush called in the day
just before I would turn away
to stoke the nearly dead ash

these days I burn from the inside
and find myself
both horse and jockey
pulling at the leather



at once soft mouth and hard hand
I notice other riders
see their skillful methods
admire their colored silk
there seem to be rules to follow
paths cut by previous boldness
a wildness let loose
that had seen earlier bottling

so many observers with large hats
sit in the stands
their hopes and expectations shout down
on the elliptical dirt

I take it in but don't understand
the myriad voices
I am trying to win
to be worthy of all this color
but mostly
I want to run



careful

by KMA Sullivan

I stand at the sink
snapping the tail
off a lobster
a strange satisfaction
as I crack the shell
clean the thread of waste
a friend
I'm getting to know again
stands at the cutting board
addressing the mushrooms
in thin slices
talks of his quiet days
when he walks his dog
where he puts his shoes
his addiction
to internet porn
chat rooms
where men vie for attention
from romanian women
while his careful wife
steps in and out of the kitchen
wondering if she can help
we look up
and nod





With Laurie Anderson in the Rice Fields

by Kerry Madden-Lunsford

White Lily

*What Fassbinder film is it?
the one-armed man comes into a flower shop
and says: what flower expresses
days go by
and they just keep going by endlessly
pulling you into the future
days go by
endlessly
endlessly pulling you
into the future?
and the florist says: white lily.*
Laurie Anderson

"Smoke Rings"

In another lifetime I used to walk through the rice fields in Ningbo, China listening to Laurie Anderson's album, "Home of the Brave." The death of Lou Reed first made me think of my son, Flannery, and then of Laurie Anderson, which took me back to those lush green rice fields near the East China Sea. Laurie Anderson wasn't married to Lou Reed in 1987. I didn't even know they were married until Flannery saw them at a college concert at UC Santa Barbara around 2007 and told me, which seemed a kind of miracle. *Laurie Anderson is married to Lou Reed? Do you know how amazing that is?*

He did not. But Lou Reed had been the soundtrack of Flannery's high school life, and consequently, our family's soundtrack, too, along with David Bowie, Gram Parsons, Rolling Stones, Strokes, Franz Ferdinand, Arcade Fire, T-Rex, Modest Mouse, Oasis, and many others but mostly Lou Reed and David Bowie.

When our youngest child, Norah, was six and experiencing a lot of David Bowie in the house through film, CD, and Flannery's Ziggy Stardust Halloween costume, she asked, "Momma, is David Bowie God?"

I said, "No. Why would you think that?"

She replied, "Well, I've never seen God, and I've never seen David Bowie either, but he's everywhere." Flannery, sixteen at the time, assured her that yes, David Bowie was God and so was Lou Reed, too. The middle child, Lucy, fourteen, probably rolled her eyes at the rock 'n roll catechism lesson, but Lucy will tell you that I always have her rolling her eyes at something her brother did or said, so maybe she simply shrugged. Maybe she said, "David Bowie is definitely NOT God, Norah."

But my soundtrack in Ningbo in 1987 was Laurie Anderson, especially on long walks after teaching English to sweet, baby-faced eighteen-year-olds who called me, "Mrs. Kerry or Mrs. Kiffen." It was our first year of marriage, and I had a clunky cassette walk-man, and I played Mozart and the Talking Heads, too, but it was mostly Laurie Anderson in the rice fields around Ningbo University in Zhejiang Province. I stuck to dirt paths around the rice fields, which were wet swamps of verdant irrigation that stretched forever. During those walks, I'd see a water buffalo that frolicked like a great black lab in the rain as I listened to Laurie Anderson sing about Frank Sinatra's smoke rings, white lilies, a big bald head sun sinking down in the sky, an island of only TV stars saying "Look at me, look at me, look at me. LOOK AT ME!" We had worked so hard to get out of Knoxville and into China, so why did I wonder what in the world I was doing in there?



I had so many questions then, but there are too many questions today even twenty-seven years later. So I have to go back to that time in China before children, before I understood what it meant to truly love someone even though I loved my new husband, Kiffen, very much. We were starting a life in China. It was to be a great adventure, the beginning of our lives together – not simply a mortgage and a workweek and babies. That could all wait. We had no money but that did not mean we weren't allowed to see the world.

Once upon a time, Laurie Anderson sang to me in those emerald green rice fields. Once upon a time, the entire contents of our lives fit into two Atlanta Falcons' bags. And once upon a time before the monster came, our son, Flannery, born in the Year of the Dragon, was a radiant and beautiful child. But first we have to go back to the beginning in the rice fields of Ningbo, China.

"White Lily and Waiting..."

In 1987, my new husband, Kiffen, found the adjustment to China easier, and he did everything to help me adapt to the Far East. Since cheese could not be found in Ningbo, he improvised and made me cheese-less pizza with tomato paste smeared on strange bread with garlic, onions, and green peppers. He found wire that he sculpted into a wild flower bouquet and called it "Flowers for Kebop." He read me Isak Dineson's letters from Africa about the coffee farm, the lions, and Denys Finch Hatton.

A few Christmases earlier, I'd insisted that my sports-minded family see the film, *Out of Africa* instead of *Rocky IV*. It was a hard-fought battle, but I was determined that our family experience something besides football and boxing, since sports had always won out in our home. My mother and younger sister were on my side, too, although Mom still remembers how my father and brothers sank into their seats with heavy sighs over tubs of popcorn as Meryl Streep uttered the words, "I had a farm in Africa." I was smitten, transported. I wanted to be like Karen Von Blixen who changed her name to Isak Dineson when she left her home to see the world and write stories. I'd already lived one year in England, but I wanted to see the whole world.

The following September, I married a man who did, too, and he also couldn't have cared less about sports. Together, we were hired to teach English in China through the International Department at the University of Tennessee, but first we eloped in Knoxville in a kind of Flannery O'Connor-themed courthouse wedding, since China only wanted married couples, and it was just easier eloping in Tennessee than in Beijing.

A friend hung "Just Married – because 'A Good Man is Hard to Find'" on Kiffen's old red Volkswagen bug parked outside the Budget Inns of America where we had the party in our motel room. We didn't want or need a fancy wedding because we were going to China to begin our lives together with a grand adventure. The rings, wedding, and reception all together cost \$120. The wedding party consisted of Kiffen's brother, Joseph, my best friend, Pattie, and our dog, Rudy, a dachshund.

Now it is true that Kiffen's mother threatened to burn the courthouse down if we got married at all because she felt that young marriage equaled the death of ambition, and who could blame her? She was the mother of thirteen children, married at sixteen to a fiddle player, whose childbearing had spanned four decades. And in my own very Catholic parents' eyes, I was already a sleazy East Tennessee version of Anna Karenina for living with a boy before marriage, so there no pleasing either side. But we were off to China in control of our own destiny, although we did need someone to watch our dog, Rudy, for a year or so.

The UT International Department had already sent our passports to China to get stamped with the correct visas to teach. And we waited. And waited some more. Telegrams went unanswered. When should Kiffen and Kerry Madden-Lunsford arrive to teach? We'd graduated and quit our jobs, given up our apartment, married, and saved two thousand dollars in American Express checks to leave for Ningbo in September, but week after week, nothing.

So we left Knoxville and moved to my parents' home outside of Atlanta to wait with Rudy, whom my mother fell in love with, which was a good and generous thing. She called him, "Mr. Rudiger," and he brought life back into our arthritic black lab, Clancy, who was pushing fifteen. Rudy went from being a theatre-house dog, one that attended films, plays, and rehearsals in my backpack to a pampered Roswell, Georgia pup, happy to live in suburbia and wear Christmas sweaters for wiener dogs.

Still our Chinese visas did not arrive, but we were determined not to give up either. After all, anybody could stay in the South and work at soul-killing temp jobs or wait tables, the bane of college graduates with degrees in the humanities, but not everybody went to teach English in China. Still, while waiting on China, we had to find some soul-killing jobs, which we did. Then we received



hints about being practical and giving up this dream of China and considering a new dream – Atlanta, anyone? After all, maybe China wasn't meant to be... My mother, worried about us going so far away, and my father, an assistant football coach then for the Atlanta Falcons, warned, "China's a black hole. Kiss your ass good-bye, folks. The Chinese don't have their act together if they can't answer one single telegram. Stay in Atlanta and find jobs. It's a great city."

But I refused to be the aged couple that would one day tell the grandchildren, "We almost went to China once." Because we definitely had jobs at Ningbo University, a new university that had opened in the fall 1986, built by a Hong Kong shipper, born in Ningbo, Yue-Kong Pao, who wanted to make good when Hong Kong came under Chinese rule in 1997.

We spent the entire fall living in my parents' guest room in the finished basement, (And I will mention here that my mother has always insisted that I say it was a finished basement, not a sad cot on cement, a naked light-bulb swinging from the ceiling.) We worked at temp jobs in Atlanta, where I answered phones in an office with the following greeting: "Dominion Mortgage Funding Corporation, may I help you?" When I told my coworkers I would be leaving for China any second, I might as well have said the moon. The only memory I have of that job was my coworker showing me a picture of her tiny daughter and saying, "Did I shit her out or what?"

I was appalled. China couldn't come fast enough. Of course, that job and the other temp jobs that followed were beneath me, since I had a brand new MFA in Playwriting from the University of Tennessee. Still, I wrote my plays when the phone wasn't ringing or I wasn't making copies and checked to see if our visas had arrived. They had not.

Kiffen, who had graduated with a degree in Psychology, worked as a waiter at a Mexican restaurant called Borders. He even won the Halloween costume contest amongst the wait staff dressed as a senorita in my mother's black embroidered dress and a sombrero from a Juárez trip to the Sun Bowl when Dad coached for the Iowa State Cyclones.

The months passed, and we tried not to go crazy waiting working new full-time temp jobs. We attended Falcons' games, saw foreign films in Virginia Highlands, ate Indian food at RAJA in Buckhead, we saw a touring production of CATS, we visited Milledgeville to see Flannery O'Connor's home, and also got parts in Thornton Wilder's *The Long Christmas Dinner*. We tried to create a temporary life while waiting for our real life to begin. Why would China hire us and give us permission to teach and then nothing? The UT International Department sent weekly telegrams to Ningbo. The leaves began to change, and then they fell from the trees.

During the darkest moment of waiting to leave, my mother found my terrible play that I'd written about us called "Make Me a Sacrifice." It was a honker of a play I'd left in my stack of writing. It got ugly fast. At the explosive denouement around midnight, she cried, "How dare you? What gives you the right to write about me? And my poor mother and father? Every detail down to those goddamned condensed Reader's Digest condensed novels, scapulars, rosaries, high balls, Johnny Carson, and crossword puzzles? Holy mother of God!"

Mortified, I said, "What do you think the playwrights, Tennessee Williams and Eugene O'Neill, wrote about?"

She paused for a moment and said, "Well, you put yourself in very high company, missy! That's all I have to say."

In a final act of desperation, we decided to lie to China. What choice did we have? The UT director at the International Department suggested we send one last telegram to say we would be arriving in Ningbo by way of Shanghai International Airport, with or without our visas with temporary passports, since they had our real ones. The visas arrived one week later, stamped in red, and so we followed up with a telegram with our real flight plans, one-way tickets to China for five hundred dollars each. We later learned that Mr. Fang, a Ningbo professor of English, went to Shanghai to meet the plane that we were not on.

The day we left, my mother held Rudy in her arms and forgave me for the awful play, and my father, wearing his coaching gear, said to my mother, "Sweetheart, better get used to it. And if you don't her want to write about you, stop talking. She'll get bored." Then he said to us, "Y'all folks take care now. Behave yourselves in China. We won't be visiting."

We packed everything we owned in two Atlanta Falcon bags and took off for the Far East, happy to leave the South far behind.

"Look at me. Look at me. Look at me!"

The day we arrived in China after a slew of flights from Atlanta to New York to Anchorage to Seoul to Hong Kong to



Hangzhou and finally a train to Ningbo, we rode in a taxi amidst a sea of bicyclers in blue Mao suits all getting off work. It was a Saturday afternoon, and we soon learned about the six-day workweek. Chinese characters emblazoned on every storefront with no English translation underneath like in Hong Kong, the bicyclers filled the streets in the rush for home, ringing bike bells, steering right in front of honking taxis and trucks. Some of the bicyclers peered into our car windows, too, and upon seeing us, laughed and shouted, "Hello! Hello! Hello!"

Kiffen squeezed my hand, sensing my fear at landing on the other side of the world even though it was exactly what we'd planned to do. But once at the brand new university, we were welcomed with a banquet of eel, chicken, shrimp and egg, ox tongue, and tons of rice wine. We met our two other western colleagues, Patrick from England, and David from Canada. David had arrived first in September, followed by Patrick in October. They each said to us, "What took you so long to arrive? Mr. Fang tried to find you both in Shanghai."

Then before either of us could explain, Mr. Fang, the one who'd met our "other" flight said with a broad smile, "Perhaps you did not come to China then. Perhaps there was a mistake in the telegram. It is okay. All is resolved now."

I think I said, "Well, it was almost Christmas, and my mother got too sad for us to leave. So we changed our minds and came later. I'm sorry, Mr. Fang."

Mr. Fang replied, "Never mind. Now you are here. Our students are very lucky to learn your very perfect English. My mother lives in Shanghai. So it was not a waste, the trip. Welcome you to Ningbo."

After more singing and rice wine, we fell into bed under a filmy white mosquito net in a small room at the Foreign Guest House with a view of rice fields for miles.

We had done it. We'd made it to China.

Since Ningbo University was so new, there was only a freshman class. The new campus was also under constant construction, which meant tightrope walking across bricks and slabs of wood, over nails and glass floating in muddy rivulets and puddles between the Foreign Guest House and the Number One Teaching Building. No matter how quick you were at this game of construction hopscotch, it was nearly impossible not to sink a foot into a gooey soup of clay and cement at least once a day while patriotic Beijing Opera music blasted over crackling speakers on campus in between classes.

I taught the English majors, and Kiffen taught the non-English majors. The Number One Teaching Building, a modern limestone edifice, consisted of two identical side-by-side buildings that joined together in the middle by a pointed roof that slanted upward toward the sky. The structure itself rose out of the rice fields all glass and concrete. When the rare foreign guest passed through for a night, we were given the job of welcoming them. I asked one woman what she thought of Ningbo when she first saw the campus, and she said, "What else could I think but Salvador Dali has arrived."

But with no Internet, no newspaper, and one main phone at the Foreign Guest House, and BBC and VOICE OF AMERICA playing only certain hours a day, and no television (unless one cared for "Mickey Mouse" dubbed in Chinese), Laurie Anderson's storytelling voice fast became my connection, my lifeline to words and language. And, for the first time in my life I began experiencing culture shock, and I didn't like it. A few years earlier, I'd been an exchange student in England, adapting with ease unlike so many of the whingeing, homesick Yanks, who complained about the lack of real hamburgers. After moving around to many various football towns as a coach's daughter, I figured I had a talent for blending in with different cultures, and China would be the same.

It wasn't. I did not blend in. I was too tall. I had hairy arms that I didn't shave and hairy legs that I always shaved. I had a big nose. I had blue eyes. I was also beyond clueless. But somehow the combination of Laurie Anderson and the high-spirited water buffalo eased my head as I roamed the rice fields cut off from the rest of world. It was as if Laurie Anderson could see into my soul and the world of China days dragging by endlessly, rice fields as far as the eye could see, and she was telling me to notice things, to be aware even in the isolation, *especially* in the isolation from everything that was familiar and safe.

Kiffen learned to speak the local Ningbo dialect, enough to shop, but whenever I tried out my wobbly Chinese in town, people laughed and not just a giggle, but gales of hilarity. It was like being famous. No matter where we went we attracted attention. By



1987, Ningbo had only been an open city for three years, so naturally people stared in jaw-dropped amazement when we moved to town. I just wasn't prepared for it.

Strangers approached us constantly to inquire, "May I practice my English with you?" and for the first month, I always said yes, and then I began to dread the question, especially if I were in the city wanting to be alone to watch people. But I couldn't watch people with the freedom I'd taken for granted in the West, because I was the one being watched as the foreigner – the "big nose" and/or the "blue-eyed foreign devil." In Ningbo, we heard "Naconime! Naconime!" whenever we biked or walked down the roads, and some people were so shocked by us that they just pointed and shouted, "Naconime! Naconime!" – "Foreigner! Foreigner!"

I found this funny for about two weeks and then irritating, but Kiffen saw it as an opportunity to perform for the astonished locals. He'd smile or bow like Charlie Chaplin and do something like take money out of his hat or ask a question in Chinese, which always brought on applause and approval. He was a natural actor playing the part of the foreigner in China with grace. Maybe his growing up in rural Tennessee gave him a deeper understanding of the farming culture around Ningbo or allowed him to have a sense of humor about it. As for me, there were many days when I felt like someone's old Aunt Maude, humorless, dour, and perpetually on the verge of tears.

"Language is a Virus"

Ningbo University had no library yet, so the only book available was a worn paperback of Tolstoy's *RESURRECTION*, and the books I'd brought from home like Isak Dineson's letters, Flannery O'Connor, Chekhov, and Maupassant's short stories. The handful of movies at the University were bootlegged videotapes of *KRAMER VS. KRAMER*, *AMADEUS* and only three-quarters of *MY BRILLIANT CAREER* (AGGGGHH!).

We also had to watch the VHS movies in the electronics lab on campus. Oh yes, they had *LOVE STORY*, too, but it was dubbed in Japanese with Chinese subtitles. I stubbornly kept watching *MY BRILLIANT CAREER*, thinking/praying/pleading that the tape would not go fuzzy and quit at the scene when Sybylla is sent to be a governess for a wild pack of children to pay off her useless father's debts, but it always did quit, so I never knew what happened. Did Mr. Frank Beecham return? Did he and Sybylla marry? I began to blame China. If we didn't live in such an outback ourselves, I could watch *MY BRILLIANT CAREER* like a normal person, and what was my own career supposed to be anyway?

Would I be a female Eugene O'Neill, a playwright scribbling family dramas for the stage, upsetting my mother? Or was I to be some kind of governess myself in those rice fields, helping the students to start an English Language newspaper, English Corner, and a drama club? I had no clue. And this made me cranky, and I think it aged me, especially when the Chinese teachers would say to me, "Ah perhaps, your husband is so very young. Perhaps, he is much younger than you, I think, and so playful and happy. Very funny man, Mrs. Kiffen." These kinds of comments did not make me feel youthful, and if I replied, "We are both twenty-four," a useless retort, they would just laugh, which made me more cross.

When I wasn't walking in the rice fields with Laurie Anderson, one of my jobs was teaching a class to the Chinese English teachers on sleepy Monday afternoons, a time when they were used to napping after lunch, not being forced to take another class. To jazz up the drowsy room, I attempted to direct them in scenes from *A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE* and *WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?* (Blanche and Stanley, George and Martha) but the English teachers didn't like doing American plays. They wanted lessons in grammar, not modern drama. Besides, Stanley was "perhaps too brutal and too mean," Blanche confused everyone, and Martha was "perhaps not so polite to George." So we compromised and did poetry – Emily Dickinson, the Beatles – conversational English, I think, was what we called the class interspersed with the three films available: "Kramer Vs. Kramer," "Amadeus," and three-quarters of "My Brilliant Career."

In the Emily Dickinson lesson we discussed being a "nobody" and being a "somebody." The class conclusion? "It is perhaps best to be a nobody so as not to draw attention to yourself." They memorized her poem, "I'm Nobody," and we talked of bogs and banishment and being famous posthumously.

As for the Beatles, after we read a chapter called "Revolution," I played them the song, "Revolution." The Beatles sang on a boom box in our Chinese classroom overlooking the rice fields, the teachers of English swaying and smiling to the music. When the song ended, I told them, quite definitively, that revolutions were "passé."



I hang my head in shame every time I think of that memory, because I was so nervous and talking too fast and coming from Knoxville, Tennessee, I had no experience with revolutions, but Kiffen, who was sitting in the back of the room, tried to not laugh. He'd come along for moral support since the class was not going well, but he couldn't help but smile at my summation of revolutions, and in that split second, I recalled a terrible period in Chinese history that I'd only just learned about – what was it?

It was something very bad. Oh yes, the CULTURAL REVOLUTION, which was *not* an art movement. It was a time of revolt in China led by Mao Zedong with violent class struggles necessary to enforce communism across the land. Slogans like “A Revolution is Not a Dinner Party,” “Smash the gang of four,” “In waking a tiger, use a long stick,” and “To read too many books is harmful,” were just some of the phrases repeated over and over during that chaotic decade. Chairman Mao's teenaged Red Guards rampaged and ruled China from 1966-1976. Professors, no doubt like the very ones I was teaching, had been forced to quit school, while they parents donned humiliating placards meant to teach them a lesson, their homes looted and claimed by the government. Educated people were punished and sent to the rice fields to be re-educated. Books were burned, musical instruments pitched in the fire, too, condemned as bourgeois.

I had learned about the Cultural Revolution from Patrick, my colleague, a Chinese scholar, since I hadn't bothered too much to read about where I'd be living other my *Lonely Planet China Guide Book*. Why? Because I had this naïve idea that would I learn about China my way, with no preconceived notions, which meant arriving knowing next to nothing, because I was busy reading American playwrights.

In fact, I was facing a group of Chinese teachers who had been directly affected by the Cultural Revolution, and I was assuring them that revolutions, in general nowadays, were passé. I knew they understood me, but they too polite to revolt. Maybe because I backtracked and said something even more stupid like, “Revolutions in Tennessee are passé.” I began to babble, horrified, ashamed. They deserved so much better. I retreated to the rice fields to listen to Laurie Anderson again.



The Boob Collage

by Marjory Wentworth

"Is it just me, or are these magazines filled with pictures of women's breasts? I mean look at this one, every page - breasts, breasts, breasts." Diane suddenly blurts out.

"Breasts, hats and hair," says Margaret. "That's all I can find."

Margaret, an outgoing woman in her late fifties, is wearing a hat made out of blue denim with a big pink rose pinned to the side, an aqua colored nylon sweat jacket and pants, and clean white sneakers. She smells like Shalimar. I recognize that perfume, because my grandmother wore it. Too much of it, all the time. Margaret is a big woman. So was my grandmother. When Margaret talks, she uses her hands. Her wrists are covered with gold bracelets. There's a densely filled charm bracelet on her right wrist, which she fingers frequently. My grandmother always wore a chunky charm bracelet too. Margaret's cousin Shelley, who is sitting next to me, notices that I'm looking at the jangle of bracelets. Shelley elbows me and whispers that Margaret's husband buys her the bracelets.

Margaret has cut out piles of pictures of women wearing all kinds of hats: baseball hats, floppy hats, ski hats and so on. Sometimes, the women wearing these hats have enormous breasts pushing up out of their half buttoned blouses or bikini tops. And, in the hatless pictures, the women's hair takes up more space on the page than their head does.

Roy, the youngest participant, says, "Don't worry ladies, those aren't women. They're models."

"Right, Roy. Women - Models. They are women who work as models," answers Shelley.

No one says anything for a few minutes. There are no windows in the hospital conference room where I teach poetry to cancer patients; the absence of windows is not something you notice right away, but when there's a lot of tension in the room, you do notice. There's no visual escape. No distraction. You can't look outside and think to yourself, *There are people driving home from work in their cars, listening to music on the radio, thinking about what they're going to cook for dinner. They don't have cancer. There are tourists going down Calhoun Street in a horse and carriage. They're not even from here. They can't be sick, they're on vacation.* The silence comes from the fact that everyone is absorbed with what's in front of them. Diane and Margaret seem to be collaborating. Diane informs us that they're working with the female body image.

"We're finding some great words, don't worry," she continues. "Check this out, we found all this stuff in magazines." She holds up phrases from magazine pages: *Create your own special look, Discover your inner beauty, Wear it well.*

"I have a feeling you two are up to something," I say, when I notice the words ALTERED STATES being taped over the chest of a nearly naked woman whose hands are raised over her head. Another woman, cut from a Virginia Slims advertisement, is wearing a fancy blue hat with flowers pinned on the side. She looks longingly in the direction of ALTERED STATES. They're both taped to a pink piece of paper. Shelley hands them a bright red piece of construction paper with a very decadent looking chocolate layer cake taped to it and the words *Indulge Yourself* glued above the cake. (Something she undoubtedly found in one of the old copies of *Gourmet*.)

"If you're going to work with body image, then you've got to put this in," she says adamantly.

"Perfect, Shelley," says Margaret, whose bracelets jingle playfully as she cuts and sorts through magazine pages.

"Looks like the anti-women's magazine collage to me," Daniel interjects.

"Exactly," Diane shakes her head with a grin, "You get the idea."

Then she does something very intriguing and out of character. She puts on bright pink lipstick! Right in the middle of the session. Then, she takes a little square of blank white paper and presses her lips to the paper.

"Perfect," she exclaims, as she glues the paper with a big pink kiss on to the middle of the page.

"Now, there's a powerful statement of sorts," Daniel, the art teacher, nods approvingly.

"Just what we needed," Margaret agrees.



I noticed an 8 by 12 clear plastic bag when Diane took out her lipstick. She leaves it on the table, and it seems to serve as a purse. She has a huge scruffy blue nylon bag that she carries around all the time - the one that held the Halloween candy we're all enjoying now. But this plastic bag seems to contain the essentials: a brush, dollar bills held together by a paper clip, the pink lipstick, a fold up mirror, a compact, some kind of red change purse, car keys, at least a half a dozen yellow brown prescription pill bottles, a couple of plastic pill holders with the names of the week labeled on the outside, a small bottle of Tabasco sauce, all kinds of loose papers, a beeper and God knows what else. Diane notices that I'm looking at the plastic bag and its contents.

"I have to put all that damned medicine in a place where I can SEE it, otherwise I get to work and forget half of what I need," she informs me.

"Smart thinking," Roy comments.

"Looks like you've got a lot of other stuff in there too," Connie enters the conversation.

"Well, yes," Diane answers, "the stuff I really need during the day."

"The essentials," I say.

"What's with the Tobacco sauce?" Shelley joins the conversation.

"I put it on my food. You know how chemo makes everything taste the same and leaves that weird taste in your mouth, the hot sauce helps with that. It works for me," Diane declares.

Margaret nods her head up and down approvingly, "I never thought of that."

"I can't believe I never thought of that, either." Janet nods.

Meanwhile, elegant Helen has opened a little bag of M&M'S and laid them out in a straight line in front of her OOO OOOO OO. The colors are grouped together in the order of the color spectrum. I'm not kidding - ROY G BIV (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet) 3 red candies, followed by 4 orange ones, then some yellow and so on. She eats the candies one at a time as she sorts through magazines, cutting out words and pictures. Helen really seems to be enjoying herself. She sucks on the M&M'S as if they were lifesavers. She seems so elegant compared to the rest of the folks in the room. Impeccably dressed, Helen's sense of order quite literally has a calming effect. She always looks so put together, especially compared to the rest of us: Roy and Daniel are wearing jeans and button down shirts. Margaret and Shelley each have on color coordinated nylon sweat suits. Diane is a nurse, and she's wearing nurse pants and a sweatshirt.

Helen is just as methodical about cutting and sorting things from magazines, as she is about sorting and eating M&M'S. One pile of clippings is comprised of words, another holds phrases, and the biggest pile is made up of pictures. The pictures seem to be of natural things. Lots of trees, of course, and landscapes. The biggest picture is two full pages from a magazine (a centerfold of sorts), which she glues to a green poster board. In the middle of this picture is a close up shot of a brown ball of tumbleweed. The tumbleweed is rolling down a dirt road in the dessert. The surrounding land is dry dull beige dirt and sand, flat, seemingly endless. No other forms of life are in the picture. Not a bush or a tree. Not a blade of grass. No animals or people, either. A kind of wasteland, with a ball of dead grass.

Helen seems very satisfied. As she pats the corners down she says, "That's the only picture I'll use." She slides all the rest of the images that she so painstakingly cut from the magazine pages on to the center of the table and offers them to the group.

She glues the phrase *ARE YOU READY FOR YOUR JOURNEY* above the tumbleweed. Margaret elbows Helen and says to the group, "Who can ever be ready for the cancer journey?"

"These are great Helen. Are you sure you don't need them?" Roy is excited.

He seems to be loosening up a bit and smiling more. Everyone regresses to about age five, when they start playing around with scissors, paint, or crayons. It's fun. That's probably why so many restaurants use butcher block paper for table cloths and hand out crayons to customers.

Helen tells Roy that he can have her cutouts of trees. She is slowly filling in every square inch of space. Clusters of words like *pain*, *loneliness* and *confusion* literally radiate out of the tumbleweed/desert image. Above and around these words are a myriad of phrases that were originally intended to promote cars, food, or beauty products. *If those copy writers only knew!*

Helen is gluing a small Xeroxed photograph of herself in the middle of the tumbleweed. Then, she glues a capital letter C



smack in the middle of her Xeroxed forehead.

"Wow, Helen, what do we have going on here?" asks Daniel.

"Well, Ms. Wentworth has really gotten me thinking about metaphors, general ones that describe the whole cancer experience. I've never seen a tumbleweed before, never been in a desert for that matter, but that picture just stopped me in my tracks."

"It really captures the loneliness you feel when you have cancer," Margaret comments. "And the loss of control. The way the tumbleweed is pushed by the wind or whatever else comes down the road."

"That's right," Helen nods her head up and down. "To me, the worst part of getting cancer is the lack of control you have over your own body, and your own destiny. It makes me feel helpless - like the tumbleweed. And I don't like that feeling at all."

"The good news is that you can make your own decisions, Helen. Like you said, it's your body. Ask questions. Read. Get a second opinion. You know, you've been through a lot in your life. Maybe you're tougher than you think," says Bill.

Shelley, whose cane has a black and orange Halloween bow tied to the top, looks as though she's nearly finished. The cane is propped up against the wall behind her chair. She's working with the heaven theme. This time with a twist. *Who says heaven is up* are the only words on the cardboard.

"I cut that out of a carpet advertisement. Get it?" She giggles and goes on, "The angels looking down are from the same ad."

Sure enough, blue and cream colored porcelain angels are looking down from the top of the sheet of poster board. Below, there are pictures of beautiful things: beaches, children running through fields of flowers, a waterfall, and a swimming pool built at the edge of the sea.

Wise cousin Margaret comments, "Isn't this the lesson cancer teaches us? Life is beautiful. All the joy of heaven may be right here on earth. You just have to know where to look for it."

"Well," says Bill, "what a great note to end on. Believe it or not it's already 8:30. We'd better start cleaning up."

Margaret moans loudly, "Just when I'm beginning to get the hang of it."

"I promise you, there's a lot to be said for starting back when you're in the middle of a creative process," I tell her.

"Our boob collage in progress is in your hands," jokes Margaret, handing it to Daniel.

We all chuckle. And with that we move everything back in to the storage closet. Everyone heads off in to the night. Home to our separate lives.





Revising the Past

by Carole Poppleton-Schradling

For most of my life, I believed that my parents had met at an officer's club in Long Beach, CA, my mom wearing a size 2 black dress and pearls (very Audrey Hepburn) and my dad his naval uniform, an officer and a gentleman. Besotted with love, they eloped to Las Vegas one night to marry in a roadside chapel; this is the stuff of legends, of romantic films on the silver screen. I think my mother told me this story when I was a child, so when she revised it a few years ago, I felt something dark and potent flow through my body, something that felt strangely like anger.

One Christmas day a few years ago, my mother visiting, she began to talk about meeting dad and this new tale sounded nothing like the old. She told me, almost laughing, that he had run in to her, literally, in a crowded hotel lobby, somewhere near Disneyworld, where she was enjoying a girl's night out with a friend. After my dad fell on her, the trio headed to the lobby bar where they proceeded to consume more cocktails, the image of my father shifting from that of an officer and a gentleman clad in dress whites to that of a highly inebriated sailor on a three-day pass.

"What do you mean you met in a hotel bar?" I asked. "What about the officer's club? The little black dress?" I was upset, my voice shaking. In my mind I was trying to calculate how long I had believed the officer's club scenario.

"Oh, well. Maybe I wore that the next night. If I recall correctly, he took me to The Palms on for our first real date; he was remorseful and charming. Kept apologizing for his behavior the night before and thanking me for the sofa. He told me to order anything I wanted. I got the lobster." She scratched her head, as if to conjure up the details, seemingly unaware of the effect her words were having on me.

"But that first night," she continued, "your dad was three sheets to the wind. He couldn't stand up straight, let alone drive back to the ship, so I let him stay at my apartment." She giggled a bit.

"You what?" I shrieked. "Mom, are you telling me you let a total stranger, a drunken sailor you'd just met, come into your home and sleep on your sofa? Are you nuts?"

"It wasn't like that. Times were different then," she retorted and drew her knees up to her chest, making her 5 foot 2 inch frame even smaller on my couch. "He was a naval officer. Done with college. From a good family in Charleston and he was going to start practicing law soon." She spoke in a tone that suggested I was daft for even questioning his integrity or hers.

"So, Mama, let me get this straight because I want to make sure I have the family history correct. You met dad, drunk out of his mind, he almost knocked you over but you continued to drink with him until he couldn't stand, so you let him sleep it off on your sofa." I paused to breathe, to study her face before I continued. "And you were so enamored with him, with his uniform and his career potential, that you went out with him the next night?" My jaw hung open, my mind reeled.

In the few moments it took for her to reply, I flashed through dozens of scenes from my childhood, scenes where my father was tipsy or outright drunk. Days when he came home from the law firm and fixed several martinis before anyone could speak to him. Nights at the dinner table where he would rant and rave if someone put her elbows on the table, talked with a mouth full of food or used incorrect grammar. The way he'd mix a stiff highball for a drive to the country club or a restaurant, and Mom would hold it carefully for him as he steered. The smell of Scotch and the clink of ice cubes in a glass permeate many of my childhood memories.

"Well, I don't know why you have to put it like that. Don't make it sound so sordid," she said. "You always exaggerate things, you really do. He treated me like I mattered, at least at first, and he didn't care that I already had two girls. In fact, he said that he loved the idea of a ready-made family."

"And you married him after only three months of dating?" I asked. "Mom, is the wedding chapel in Vegas true?"

"Oh sure. Sure. He was very romantic that way, your father," she said, a small smile lighting up her face. "You know, I was dating another man for a bit, a Colonel, and one night I came home after a date to find your father curled up on my front porch, waiting. He cried when he saw me, wrapped his arms around my knees, and begged me to be with only him ... A



few weeks later we eloped and then we were moving back to Alabama. You know, he treated your oldest sisters like they were his own, at least until you were born. I admit, things did change a bit then."

"But Mom," I said, trying hard to keep my voice steady, "you had two kids at home. He was drunk when you met him and then you found him lurking on your porch one night. Was he drunk? I bet he was drunk." I slapped my knee for emphasis. "Mama, can we say 'stalker'?" "Why did you marry him so fast?" My voice was thin, bordering on hysterical. I got up and sat closer to her, looking at her face for some affirmation that I wasn't crazy, that she had thought about the risks, about the young girls she was raising on her own.

"Baby. You have no idea what life was like at that time. I was a divorced woman, 31 years old, with only a high school education and two kids. I didn't have many choices, and your father was a good man, a man with potential." She unraveled herself from the fetal position and leaned toward me, speaking in an almost whisper, the lights from the tree blinking merrily across the room. "Sure, he drank alot, but who didn't. It was the sixties. You ask me 'How could I marry a man like that so fast? How could I bring him into my girls' lives? My answer to you is 'How could I not?'"

And that was the end of that conversation. She shut the door on the past, and I was left to sift through my emotions, my faulty memory and forced to reconstruct a new story about how my parents met. A few days later I was on the phone with one of my sisters, so I decided to ask her what she knew about our parents' courtship.

"Hey, what do you know about how mom and dad met? About their first date? I heard a strange story from Mom the other day."

"Well," she answered, "I think they met at a bar ... maybe Disneyworld? and Dad was blotto, flirted with Mom and then, I think, he may have slept on her sofa. I'm not certain but I think that's what happened."

"So you knew?" I asked. "I just found this out. All this time I thought they'd met at an officer's club, mom in a little black dress and dad in his uniform. I had this whole scene imagined in my head and it turns out it was all a lie. Just something I imagined, I guess."

"Hmmm. Don't know where you got that one. Maybe you watched that Richard Gere movie one time too many. Or maybe they actually went to the naval club while dating and got dressed up. Who knows? Who cares? It was almost 50 years ago."

"I care. I wanted them to meet in a romantic way, a meaningful way. I wanted to try and understand how they ended up together despite so many differences," I explained, my voice trailing off into the mouthpiece.

"Poor Carole," she said, "you always did have an overactive imagination and unrealistic ideas about love."

I hung up the phone and sat down, hard, on the floor. The knot in my stomach cinched itself even tighter and I cried for my mother, a beautiful woman who felt as if she had no choices in life, my intelligent father who depended on a bottle of alcohol to allow himself to feel, and for myself, wondering how many other stories I'd been told throughout my life that would turn out to need revision.



Waddle

by Michelle Hopf

Flannery O'Connor. You've heard her name your whole life. You're from Middle Georgia and you want to be a writer. She is your legacy. Your literary grandma. You do a writerly swoon when you hear the titles of her short stories. "A Temple of the Holy Ghost." "Everything that Rises Must Converge." "The Life You Save May Be Your Own." *Swoon*. But you've never read those stories. In fact, the only story you've read besides the one you have to teach is "Good Country People," and you didn't read it. Your eleventh grade English teacher did.

Mr. Gene Waddell. Tall. Iced tips on short hair. Gel so thick, the rain can't touch it. Cheerleading coach. Better than you. Dressed, as always, in his khaki slacks, white button up and maroon tie. "You mean to tell me you people have never read a Flannery O'Connor story?" he stares you all down, furrowed eyebrows behind gold-rimmed frames. "I am from her town. I went to her college. I have been to her house! Gah!" He throws his hands up in the air and you put your face in your palm because here you go again.

Waddell, or Waddle, as you all called him, pulls out a book and tells you all to put your stuff away and listen up. He is going to learn you well and then you're going to be so inspired you're going to run off to Milledgeville and teach a chicken to walk backward, like she did. Or so he says. Of course, he reminds you his dog has a better shot at making the paper, so don't get your hopes up. Apollo, the dog, is smarter than all of you. In case you forgot.

Waddle settles into the spot light at the front of the classroom on another hot day on C Hall. He clears his throat, adjusts his glasses and straightens his tie. "Good Country People," he says, except he doesn't just say it. He deepens his voice—makes it as rough as it can be, stretches his neck out as far as it will go, squints his eyes at the students in the front row and says slowly, with a Southern drawl "Goood. Country. People." "Besides the neutral expression that she wore when she was alone, Mrs. Freeman had two others," he pauses, gives the class his most menacing glare. "Forward and reverse, that she used for all her *human* dealings." He cackles and continues. He reads the story just like that the whole time. And in spite of your feelings toward him— he's a bit of a loose cannon. Mean even—You're fascinated. You're nervous about what in the world makes Mrs. Freeman and Mrs. Hopewell's story so menacing. You're worried that Joy is going to do something crazy to the old ladies. He gets to the part about the name... "Then she had gone and had the beautiful name, Joy, changed without telling her mother until after she had done it. Her legal name was." He pauses. "Wait for it," he warns. And then, with a low, scratchy, "Huuuulllga." He raises his left eyebrow into a perfect, tall arch and reads, "When Mrs. Hopewell thought the name, Huuuuulllga, she thought of the broad black hull of a battleship." You didn't love Waddle. But damn, he could read a story. You felt terrible for Huuulllga when Pointer left her in the loft of the barn and stole her leg. Her LEG.

That memory haunts you when it comes time to teach "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." That story haunts you too. You figure that's normal. Flannery O'Connor writes Southern Grotesque, which is a fancy way of saying creepy. You can get behind that. O'Connor says, "Whenever I'm asked why Southern writers particularly have a penchant for writing about freaks, I say it is because we are still able to recognize one." You wonder if that's still true. You wonder if your literary grandma passed that skill on to you.

You were late to school the day it happened. It's about a year later—your senior year. You rush into the new building and upstairs to your locker. Waddle's door is shut even though it is already 7:48. Usually Waddle's in the hall shoos students off to homeroom. Sometimes he sneaks in behind your locker door when you're in a hurry and scares the hell out of you when you close it. "Gooooood morning," he'll smile Like creeping on your locker is normal. But not today. "Whatever" you think. "No big." He must be out. In homeroom, you hear the whispers. "Mr. Waddell is dead." You hear the "no ways" and the "that can't be trues." Announcements come on and you can hear it in the principal's voice. Something *is* wrong.

You stand up and say the pledge, sit as soon as the moment of silence is over. The announcements come back on: "I regret to inform you that Mr. Gene Waddell was found dead in his home early this morning." The silence is thick. You look at your homeroom teacher and she's just as horrified as you and the other students. No one knows what to say.



No one does anything that day. That week really. Suicide. You hear the rumors and teachers reluctantly confirm. Waddle. Cheerleading coach. Theatre aid. Academic Team Coach. English teacher. He wasn't your favorite. You liked his class. He annoyed you. You learned a lot. He mocked people- just as likely to compliment as he was to insult. He always smiled. The unpredictability made you nervous. One time, someone said, "Who do you think you are, Waddle? Batman?" and he swept everything off his desk, laid across it on his stomach, feet straight back, arms spread wide and said "Duh. I can fly." You *hated* Apollo and the fact that he insisted that no one could measure up to his dog. He had a temper. Even then, he was the kind of teacher you could trust and you knew it. Your friend tried to drop his honors class and he wouldn't sign the form because he knew she could do it. She could. She did. Another friend said he was the first teacher she told she was pregnant, the first to know it was a girl. His response was "You should name her Gene-a. After me!" He was an off the wall teacher. He told you English was your thing.

You wonder all week what happened. You can see him and the other cheerleading coach parting ways from the gym, or maybe even dinner after practice. You hear that he was upset. Some say he had inappropriate relations with a student, a student who'd be ostracized mercilessly over the next few months. You know that even if that storyline is true, the girl isn't to blame. No one could back Waddle into a corner.

No. You think he left dinner, a little sad, but making a witty remark and flashing his grin. The other coach knew something was off because she and Waddle had been a team for five years, but he'd never slip so far as to let her know the extend of it. You think he went home and filled Apollo's food and water up, ready to last the dog a couple of days. Then he'd sit his dog down. Waddle would even get down on his knee, eye to eye with the great Apollo and say, "You are the most intelligent dog in the South. Probably the world! You will be fine." He'd give the dog a meaningful stare, pat him on the head and then put a wall between them. Next, he would go to his room. He'd lie down on a neatly made bed. He'd straighten his tie, lay one hand over his stomach. Put the gun up to his head and pull the trigger. His ghost would get up, survey the body and clean his glasses, like the Misfit standing over Grandma. "Well done, sir." He'd whisper, nodding his head. And walk away.

You go through the motions. Walk the same ways to class. The week is quiet in your memory. His room is locked up. It's plastered with signs. "We'll miss you." "Rest in peace." "We love you." That week is a haze in your memory. It haunts you. Like Christ haunts the South. You can still hear Waddle's Pointer whispering, "*Show me where that wooden leg joins on.*" The memory makes your skin crawl. You can still see his squinted eyes glaring at your class after he read that line. "Did you all hear me right? Show me where that wooden leg joins on." You wonder what made that man so full of life put a bullet in his head.

Rumors fly, but no one knows the truth. You think about O'Connor and Southern writers and freaks and you know that you knew part of it. You can't read her work because it's *too* close to home. Waddle crawled out of one Flannery's stories and into your life. You recognized him.



Mortal

by Anne Bailey

Coach Rice ordered Edward to dive into a pile of gravel, and Edward dove. The exercise was designed to toughen up the team after too many defeats. Coach Darby brayed in Edward's face, spraying tobacco juice, calling him a pussy. In the triple digit heat of August in Birmingham, Edward slogged through the two-a-days in preparation of the season. Every year players in the area passed out and died, much reported in the local news. When he developed an infected ingrown toenail, he continued to play until the infection broke wide open during a game. Although the pain was searing, he pushed through it. I allowed Edward to choose public school so that he could play football despite my long held opinion that it is a savage undertaking and a dangerous game. I could have insisted that he attend a private school but I didn't.

We need dynamic tension in order to grow and deepen as human beings. Indeed conflict, danger and pain shape the contours of our lives, in ways both positive and negative. The hero's journey requires adversity before the hero can emerge just as the human body is designed for a traumatic birth process. The infant is pushed from the mother. The child is forcibly expelled from the mother. This is the process that begins each life. As Edward's mother, I came to appreciate the difference in our methods of establishing authentic presence. I pushed against authority and social standards while Edward joined that great social equalizer: football. We each discovered the corporeal voice of our experience, and in doing so inched our way forward on the spiritual path.

I myself logged hundreds of hours in the bleachers, watching Edward practice and cheering at his games. It's not possible to live in Alabama without being affected by football because it is not simply popular but is a lifestyle. Football dominates the calendar and consciousness of Alabama. Edward was affected simply by being here. But I never thought he'd play. He'd been a soccer player from the time he could walk. When he was on the YMCA team, I coached, herded the little ones up and down the field, the ball somewhere in their midst. He continued playing soccer through high school. But then he started to burn to play football. A longing came upon him, a sort of fever for the lights and the pageantry, the warriors and generals, the unbridled passion that fuels the play.

One summer we took a grand train trip out west, going to visit Edward's aunt Tiia in Seattle and then taking the ferry to the San Juan Islands. After several days of camping there, we came back down to Seattle and took the train to San Francisco. While there, we went to see friends in Berkley, and went hiking in and around the Berkley Canyons, we came across a deep canyon the walls of which were rather narrow. And across the chasm was a wooden plank. Edward looked at the plank and said he wanted to cross it. The drop was deep. I said no. NO. He asked, "Please, Mom. I can do it". I said NO. He took my hands and looked straight into my eyes. "Mom, I can cross the plank. I won't fall." He entreated and beseeched. I let him cross. I told him to put his entire being into crossing the plank, and to not allow himself to be distracted by anything. I could barely look at him as he walked across, his back facing me. When he reached the other side I told him not to look at me, and not to talk to me on the way back. He beamed when he returned. I was angry. I am angry when I fear that he will be hurt. Yet I knew in my gut that if I undermined his trust in himself, I would cripple his potency. I am telling this story because it is not different from later watching the players on the football field that would lunge for him and try to crush him as I sat in the stands.

The coupling between the body and the spirit, the connection between our physical and spiritual is a corps d'esprit. Being the body is an intrinsic to our experience as human beings. Part of our practice is the intentional aligning of body, mind and spirit with the motion of awake. In this way we develop the timbre and the pitch of the corporeal voice. From our particular place on earth, from our firm planting on this earth that spins in space, in a context so fluid and shifting as to be the paradoxical base of trust, a human being manifests in physical form. Our voice emanates from the body. Our spiritual life is dependent on the body, as far as we know. Anything else is speculation.



Although we tend to think that the mind dominates the body, the mind is part of the body. Thus learning to move in tandem is a powerful practice. We put great stock in our thoughts as the dominant power in our lives yet perhaps that is backwards. Consider the body as the parent and the mind or will as the child. A child may try to manipulate her parents in the aisle of the grocery, with wild, determined eyes and a deep pull of breath. She intends that breath to be her last before the mort kicks into mortality. She reasons that after her imagined death her bereaved parent will regret every refusal to implement her explicit wishes when she lies still and cold in the canyon of forbidden cookies and candy. But the body dominates like an Aikido master. The child simply loses consciousness. Her breathing resumes. The annoyed parent steps over the child and waits. This is how the body contains the mind that thinks it is in control. This is what we learn from the physicality of our experience, from being a body. Perhaps this is the power of playing football and crossing canyons for a boy like Edward, coming to harmony of mind and body.

As a girl and then woman, I've crossed canyons of my own, sure of the validity of my own experience regardless of the attempts to dissuade me. My mother and sister called me a "weird girl" when I didn't see any reason to continue to shave, wax or sugar the thick hair from my legs and armpits. From my point of view, the society showed a steady lack of good judgment in deeming it imperative for a successful woman, for the wives of handsome men, for the thin beauties in glossy magazines to remove the hair from their legs, underarms and crotches. Plucked and powerless, these ladies complied with a system of beauty that had no relevance to me, not in high school. So I stopped shaving. If you want to cross a canyon as a woman in the United States of America, just let your hair grow free, and go about your business as before. Women were especially harsh. As I passed groups of glistening bathing beauties at the pool, some made gagging noises. Some loudly expressed disgust. "That's so gross! What's wrong with her?" Once a man approached me to ask if I was from France. Truly lots of men liked it. They discovered that it didn't change anything about attraction. One little boy asked how come I had that hair and his momma didn't. "She does have it," I said. "She just removes it." Insisting on the experience of being the body, of being my body is powerful.

I listened to my cycle. When I cramped, I folded in thirds on my bed. I pressed my fists into the bowl of my belly. I tracked the origins of pain, tracing the whispered strips of aching down my legs, the layers shed moving through and into the bright cold air. I didn't mind the bloody mess, this secret, hidden life. The nature of untampered experience is sacred, and I reveled. I trusted this rugged frame that reliably protected all essential guest services no matter what man I chose to explore, where I danced past dawn, or walked in the grey mist broken as any human ever was or ever will be.

My durable heart stayed steady in rhythm while I explored New York during the month of taking LSD every morning as a student at Barnard College, continuing to go to class and do my work while tripping. At the end of it I was exhausted and lonely. I was bone thin and flew home to Alabama for spring break in a red A-line wool skirt. My legs moved across the floor and words come from my mouth and no one noticed a thing. I did not ever take LSD again and I finished the semester with three A's, a B and a C in geology. I sat in the sun and smoked, buzzed on caffeine. No more soccer because of a ACL surgery. I signed up for folk dancing and yoga. I met another woman who didn't shave, and another.

When I was born, the blood vessels burst in my mother's uterus after a liberal dose of pitocin, unnecessary for a hearty mother on her third child. She was taken to surgery and I was placed in a plastic bucket in a bright nursery. There I learned the intelligence of self-reliance. I closed my eyes to the light and the goggling faces, to the knuckles tapping on the glass. A uniformed woman whose voice I didn't know held me and nudged my cheek with a rubber nipple. She squeezed drops of the warm formula to tempt me, formula built in a modern laboratory to fit the needs of mothers and babies alike, for ease and speed, no messy, leaking breasts, no need to stay near baby, available for purchase in powder and cans. Welcome to the new, mobile world of independence not designed for flesh on flesh, for the smelly wetness of mama, the soft stroke of long fingers on a newly emerged head as the baby pounds the breast with an impossibly small fist, while she sucks and swallows and sucks some more, presses the nipple between her tongue and palate, doing what she is made to do. My mother was in surgery and didn't come near until I'd been alone and bottled for days and nights, swaddled in the blanket. I smelled the antiseptic



and slept, returning alone to the dark sea of rhythms and memory. After that the ancient tides were my touchstone. I went into the woods, hid under leaves piled high, in castles of brambles, behind thick bushes that screened the world into sensible leaf and stem, under sinks and in closets whose door slats filtered sound and light and gave me pause to cry or catch my breath or simply to be silent and wait.

When Edward was born, the only un-medicated, vaginal, breech delivery to date at UAB Hospital, I didn't let him go once they'd sewn me up from the episiotomy. I held him and slept with him and nursed him and screamed when anyone wanted me to offer him up. The earth does not give up the bulb too soon, but holds it, sure of its growth and bloom. I was sure of my boy in a way that is coursing blood, peristalsis, the purifying liver. He roared on big wheels, dug holes, sobbed that ET went home, concocted potions, crossed canyons and played football. And when he asked me to help him fit into society and shave my legs and underarms, I complied.





Talking to My Mother 776 Miles Away

by Debra Kaufman

She tells me again
about some distant cousin's cancer,
how grackles gather
greedy at her feeder—
those cold white eyes.

Her voice a series of impulses
transmitted by wire.
If talk is cheap
why can't we ever
mean more than we say?

Why do I expect
the mother she never was,
one who says she loves me as I am?
I should have been more
like her, or less.

I want to hold her
on the line in deep quiet.
Imagine a still lake
holding us buoyant
while the milky moon pours down.

She stops talking. A pause...
It's time, she says,
for *Dancing with the Stars*,
and with a click she leaves me
suspended mid-breath.



Because We Could

in memory of Nancy Grandjean

by Debra Kaufman

Because we could do nothing
to stop your languishing
we lingered in shops

in search of the perfect card—
perhaps this Chagall bird with *Peace* inside.
We held flowers in bewildered hands.

We brought a silk shawl to warm you,
sorbet to cool your mouth,
candles to light your way.

We held your gnarled hands, so soft.
We brushed your hair.
We prayed or chattered or sang,

the only runes we knew.
If you listen closely, you said near the end,
you can hear things.

We stood like sentries
but let you pass, you
of the copper hair and feather boa.

May your spirit visit
when we least expect it:
in the amber gleam of a fox's eyes,

as light through a beaded curtain,
or as a wren—quick, quizzical—returning
to nest where she knows she is welcome.



Refashioning Ruby

by Tabitha Bozeman

I.
Mother's
bent
and twisted fingers draped
faded prom dress pink
chiffon over the fabric covered torso that told
her story as she painstakingly
reworked the past,
pin
by
pin.
Arthritis and age changed
her hands but not
her love
of ruffles
and lace
and sequins.

She always wore her wealth.

Even when I emptied
her bed pan
and counted pills.

II.
The day she died,
I hitched a ride home
from campus
and sat with her,
wondering
what to say.

Later, I stared up
from the drive
into the window
at the top of the stairs
where the naked bust form leaned

and my grandmother cried over her mother's bed.



III.
Years after my death,
they carefully divided
 gloves,
 broaches
 and scarves;
costumed innocence
 and imagination,
 these grandchildren of my daughter's.
They watched me pin
 and drape designs
 over the half-
 mannequin,
loved sifting jewels,
 buttons and beads,
 fabric scraps--
remnants of myself,
 before I was Mother.



Word Game

by Chivas Sandage

I
I heard your voice last night.
After decades of silence, you spoke,

picking up an old thread of conversation.
Sliding into the driver's seat next to me

with a drink in your hand, you turned the key
and returned the volley as knocking

ice started the song of the car. Top
down, you drove your red VW bug like a toy

through the landscape of my childhood. *There*
is the apartment where your mother, you say.

That is the path where we, I say.
There is the house where I, you say.

That is the hill where you.
When you were born.

How I walked to school.
When I photographed you.

When we walked together.
Where you stood when I drove up.

Where I lived when you went away.
When you asked if I remembered you.

II
You start the next game—one word
at a time, the first
in your mind, you say. We plunk
words against wind: you say *sun*—
I say *saltwater*; you nod and say *green*—
tomato; newspaper—
pipe; rain—
walking; sidewalk—
Mama's back, home—
free; U.S.A.—



*army; camera—
monocular (like the one you gave me, I say);
you nod and say eye—
I (I say, index finger to chest); child—
blood; sweat and tears (you cheat)—
eye, oh, you said that, so: you; we—*

Father, I've come to the end
of what I knew—of us. Of you.

III

As a child, I clocked
more time studying your face
in photographs than next to you.
A character named father
with a bit part, you died at the end
of the first act, reappearing as a voice
I only hear when I'm asleep.
Your ghost fades year
by year like your photos.

I've come to the end of the game, father.

I cannot remember the rest
of what we said but I see your shadow
behind the screen door
asking if I remember you.

Now, I must ask the same. Do you, father?

Do you? As a girl, I wondered what you saw
in your head when you thought of me.

I imagined you tucked safely into your other life
somewhere I'd never seen

driving with an empty seat beside you
staring at the road ahead but seeing a snapshot

you'd taken of me
and turning around.

Turning toward me.
I called your absence *father*.



Break

by Valentina Cano

Breaking him would be
a matter of choosing the right
wrist movement.
Not the one that jerked like
a shopping cart,
twisting at the slightest pressure,
but the one
that was like an origami sculpture.
Breathless.
Weightless.
One twitch of it,
one look of it resting on the desk
and she'd hear his body
cracking open like a scallop.



Met My Old Lover's Mother at the Grocery Store

by Deana Nantz

We shared a look fifteen years later.
I loved her through association,
the manufacturer of adolescent boy face
rubbed off by my wet mouth
full of warm metal and bubble gum.

A father's knock-off,
he faded out like cheap leather.
The old man died and the arthritic mother
clawed her way out of the grave,
rewinding to the woman before the men.
No one moves forward from the death of love.
Those two were our first.

Last day of December with fresh husbands in tow,
we passed the bloody butcher and exchanged
hearty smiles shot from scratchy souls

that knew and know and know.



Mother

by Cheyenne Taylor

She had scarves, tortoise shell, leopard print;
 beads of amber
eyes on broken strings, turquoise blossoms
 in silver leaves,
Brighton-style crosses. She kept worn-grey
 house slippers, orange,
cotton shorts cast on the floor from morning,
 an Indian head t-shirt
with Clairol hair-dyed shoulders. And a dark green
 cardboard box, with deflated,

sick-rose-print, a hangnail tab, and prayers
 behind the Yellow Pages,
held tiny hospital bands, black buttons
 of umbilical cord
cast off like desiccated snail shells. Her spool
 heels, black and sheen
dull like sea coal, were christened
 with red mud.



Us/Them

by Cheyenne Taylor

I.

Them,

Them oxycodone low-rollers,
blackballers,
torn jeans and sideways baseball caps.
Words stretch out on tobacco stains,
black grease under fingernails –
they flick *fucks* over their shoulders
into gravel. Bowed in concrete,
brick-lit bars, they chew
on their tongues.

Them's stinking city,
with its indelible passage of time
squatting in rotten storefronts
and flossing the buildings of Birmingham:
how it sprawls
and clicks its skinny back over black tar roofs,
shudders before it stretches
its arms and drifts off.

II.

Them,

Them kids
with dollar store crayons, or,
their daddies, Them dirt-bathed miners,
spitting into limestone ash,
crouched beneath the longwall
while it claws at its own face.
They live under back roads
under overtime skies.
They know that coal dust,
in raw cuts,
leaves blue scars –
them Union tattoos.

Them's vinyl houses:
bruised with sweet red soil, blistered with chips of paint.
Knuckled with dirt dauber nests,
they steep in Devil's Cushion
and kudzu until the shutters
give out and the windows
purse their lips.



Lunch at the Pink Elephant

Boca Grande, Florida

by Barbara Conrad

We've come for the codfish, lightly battered,
served on a soft roll. Or the signature Pink Cobb
with baby greens and arugula.

Next to us on the patio, a tableful of old men
eating grilled cheese and french fries, off-menu.

When we quiz the waitress, she tells us,
They've been coming here for twenty-five years.
Plus, they asked.

We order the same, that common childhood staple,
two rounds, with extra fries, eat every bite.

Who are you?
we ask the men as they pass to leave.
P.I.P.'s, they say. Previously Important People

We laugh, then ramble back six decades to where
we started. Nine southern gals in compliance and

platitudes, growing up in the 50's, hoping
for husbands and big breasts. We know now
what satisfies. Breeze off the gulf.

Crushed oyster shells under our feet.
This salty taste of cheddar on white bread.



Baking Chicken Pie with My Mother

*after finding her recipe, handwritten
on a yellowed 3x5 index card*

by Barbara Conrad

Regular pastry for a two-crust pie

so why not make it irregular

for once, Mom, then we can

Boil the chicken in salt water

while guessing how much chicken and how the hell

much salt did it take for you to stay married those 50 years,

before we have to

Pull the chicken from its skin and bones

and there you were, skin and bones in the end, neither of us ready to

Put the chicken in the pastry

but this time we won't save the breast for him,

instead we'll

Cook it until tender

like that year in 9th grade when you took me shopping

for a broken heart but all I needed was a hug -- so let's

Sprinkle a little flour and pepper on it

Pour a little broth over it

a little of this, a little of that -- how little

I knew you, how much I wish we could have

Put some water on the top crust to make it stick better

like a baptism, like a blessing for my granddaughter,

born on your 100th. Is that you behind her blue eyes?

Time now to

Cut a few slits in the top

just a few, to let out some steam, Helen, may I call you Helen,

then together we'll

Bake it until the crust is brown

Slice and serve with warm broth



Chocolate Pudding

by Barbara Brooks

heat 2 cups milk until just boiling

Only have 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups regular milk, wonder if a little buttermilk will work

haven't had it since I don't know when

when milk ready, pour in mix, remove from heat

stir constantly until thickened.

Mom put the pudding in small ramekins of which I have one

I put it in a big bowl

put plastic wrap on top to prevent a skin from forming

Mom never did that, neither do I

I eat a bit when it is still warm,

let it cool and put it in the fridge.

It's cold now.

I break through the skin,

it's as creamy as Mom's.

I remember more chocolate.



Rosalind, Later

by Gail White

It seems to me now
I was happiest in Arden,
teasing him, boy with a boy,
equal with equal.
Even though I was relieved
to be back in girl's clothes,
and thrilled to be married,
lover with lover,
I still miss the greenwood.
He was so charmingly stupid
in bygone days.
Now he's too dignified
ever to admit I'm the smart one.
Celia would say that a wife
must lose her illusions.
It's true I suppose, but I wish
he would still let me tease him.
Each night I tell my daughters
tales of the greenwood.
I'm hoping they'll run away young.



Coming to America

by D.A. Spruzen

Thanks to Hollywood I knew America—
loud, slangy, violent, the Wild West
As we drove upstate from JFK
I looked out through

the windows of my shell
that small bug he proudly
owned outright
at quiet people

walking calm streets
in small towns of white
wooden houses
with no sidewalks
and no streetlamps
leading medium docile mutts

A different kind of normal until
a child in a cowboy costume
cursed and hit his mother



One Brother Down

by D.A. Spruzen

An early call
Before I answer I know
Crying bubbles over
David, the last but one who knew me
Ever since the day I was born
Future calls will be left to their own devices
Going and grinding Michael hangs on

Zigzagging through his last days



Buddhist Proverb

by Christine Swint

i.m. of the Atlanta Child Murders, 1979-1981

The dead are many, the living few.

So many have lost a brother, or a friend.

Thin ropes of rain strike the roof

as she waits for her son to come home.

So many have lost a brother, or a friend.

She parts a curtain, looks into the dark

and waits for her son to come home—

he walked down to Leon's Bottle Shop.

She parts a curtain, looks into the dark—

a neighbor saw him cross Elm Street.

He walked down to Leon's Bottle Shop

and tipped over the edge of night.

A neighbor saw him cross Elm Street.

He went to buy her a tin of snuff

and just tipped over the edge of night.

Or did some spirit whisk him away

after he bought her the tin of snuff?

Maybe he's gone to his father's house.

Did some spirit whisk him away,

through the pines down by the creek?

Maybe he's gone to his father's house.

Thin ropes of rain strike the roof.

Among the pines down by the creek,

the dead are many, the living few.



Two Stones, Each with the Letter *B*

by Mary Galvin

Folks thought we were twins
although ten months separated our births
because we looked alike and
were together always, as we are now.
The hurricane tore us from the tree our frantic
mother had tied us in
to save us from the surging sea.
And she was right—
the ocean never reached our perch
but the limb snapped and we fluttered
like fledglings fallen from our nest.
It took four days for her to find us
tossed amidst the debris.
She stole these slabs from the Swintons' building site
in ruins before it was barely begun.



No One's Daughter

by Carrie Spell

I never called my mother "Mama," so when I am with my husband, Bryan, and we are around his mother, I feel weird. He calls her Mama exclusively. I call her by her first name, Marleena. She has thin hair, blue eyes, and she smells of powder.

We're outside her house in Mississippi, the house my husband grew up in, sitting out front on wrought iron chairs that rock. We come here once a year and stay for a week so that my husband can see his family and some friends he's kept since junior high.

Marleena is a manager at a doctor's office, and she tells me that when doctors from around the country call there for information, they always compliment her soft southern accent.

"I didn't know it was anything," she says. I smile at her, but I think she does know. I've always liked the way she talks. She calls all store-packaged bread "lightening bread." She doesn't put dishes away, she puts them "up." A shopping cart at the grocery store is a "buggy."

"Mama, you always had the sweetest voice of all your sisters," Bryan says. He has his drawl back. At home, in upstate New York, he sounds like Anderson Cooper. Here, he sounds like Gomer Pyle. That might be an exaggeration, but it's so sudden, the way his voice, his whole manner of being, shifts as soon as we enter the door, maybe even as we cross the Mississippi state line. It's disconcerting, his change. Gomer Pyle is what I think of.

My mother-in-law is wearing a long denim skirt, flowered shirt, white walking shoes and white socks folded over. I envy her, the outfit, the way she talks, the way she sits out here in front of the house under the awning. She knows who she is. She doesn't try to be anyone else, and why would she.

Mississippi is nice, at least now in late September. Breezy, cool. I never thought it would be. I always pictured it to be hot, dusty, full of old trucks.

Across the street from us, a man is out pruning rose bushes.

"Did you see Mr. Stewart?" she asks my husband, gesturing across the street.

"Yeah."

"Y'all need to go over there and say hi sometime. He asks about you. You don't get home enough."

"No, I don't guess we do," my husband says.

Bryan once told me that he could not make it without these visits home. We haven't been to visit my own family in Florida in the three years we've been married. I think of my own mother, her olive skin and dark hair, her rock hard abs. I love my mother, but I don't feel that it matters whether or not I see her. I know she is somewhere, doing things; we speak on the telephone.

Marleena looks at me. "When Bryan's daddy proposed to me, I was only seventeen, and I thought he was joking so I laughed at him. I said, 'How could I leave my mother?'"

We laugh, Bryan and I. I've heard this story already, several times, in fact. I imagine Bryan has heard it all his life, maybe more after he graduated from college and moved north for a job. But maybe not. Perhaps Marleena brings this story out only around me.

Bryan once told me how hard it was, that first year away. He thought people were meaner. He used the word Yankees, which I thought was quaint.

I told Bryan that everywhere I go, people seem the same. I fit in anywhere, pretty much. Or, more accurately, I fit in equally as badly everywhere I go. I don't think of anywhere as home, though I lived in Florida for eighteen years. Oranges and sunshine mean the same as maple syrup and snowstorms or cactuses and fajitas. Sometimes I feel that I am no one.



Sitting out here on this chair, with Bryan next to me, and Marleena with her powdery smell, and the old man across the street, and the breeze and the sounds of kids riding scooters, I feel that I could lift up into the air like a scrap of fabric. I could float away without a home, without a mother at all, just drift right off, and Bryan would stay right under this awning, talking with his mother, outside, naturally.



NOONTIDE

by Jacklon Michelle Wright

Ornitha cleared the wood rail fence real good—for an old woman. When she was a child, her father had a farm. He had cows, and the cows had fences. She made it a habit to jump those fences. She would never open the gate, even when he threatened her. With a hand on the rail post and a push upward, she would swing her feet high through the air and into the pasture.

One time she fell and busted her lip. The blood tasted like a one-cent piece, and her father yelled even more. Now, she had a son who liked to yell.

"You're seventy-eight years old, momma!" he yelled at her once. "You're not young anymore!"

"Seventy-eight, my ass!" she thundered back. "I'm as young as I need to be!"

He shook his head in a pained way. "I don't like this any more than you do, but you're too old and feeble to stay by yourself anymore."

"Phillip," she proclaimed, mustering all her courage, "On my dying day, I'll still be stronger than you."

Ornitha went to live with him anyway, but not because she was old, and certainly not because she was feeble.

The air barely left her chest when her feet touched ground in the pasture.

"As young as I need to be," she said aloud.

The sky gleamed and a hawk sailed high above her shoulders. She looked back at the highway. A dead animal lay in the grass. She thought it was a dog. A limp carcass was draped loosely over its bones.

"Hawks eat their prey alive," she said, walking through the pasture.

The trees were bare and solemn and mingled within were the deep greens of cedar and pine. The branches clawed their way over the field, ripping shadows all along the tall grasses. She gazed up at them, then kept walking. Suddenly, laughter—sweet and melodious—trickled from the old woman's lips.

"Reverend McNew won't be tellin' on me no more!"

Crouched behind a window, the minister would watch her drive by in her truck, then apply that information to any meaningless conversation he had with her son. But she could apply information, too; and hers consisted of a female other than Mrs. Reverend McNew. A married man might ruin his reputation, but a married preacher is almost guaranteed to ruin his business.

Ornitha laughed once more, her long legs bristling against the tall pasture grass. Now, she had reached the spot.

"So quiet."

It was quiet, just like her son's house. His wife, Janice, and their two daughters, Eleonore and Leigh Ann, had been gone a month now, but she could still hear the last argument. She could remember every word of it.

"When you decide we're more important—" Janice had said.

"You know you're more important," her husband corrected her.

"No, Phillip," she said, her eyes heavy with sadness, "We don't know that. We know your hobby takes first place."

"It's not a hobby, Janice. It's not something I can help."

Sitting on the edge of the bed, Janice looked up at her husband. "Eleonore and Leigh Ann have two fathers," she said. "One who's sober and one who's not sober. They need *one* father, Phillip."

"Is that what you're hoping to find in town?" he asked.

"Are you accusing me of something?"

"Not yet."

Janice laughed.



The old woman smiled at the yellow flowers surrounding her.

"He'll catch her," she said, aloud. "My boy will find out she's been cheating on him."

She bent forward, her spine cracking and popping all along the way as her lean fingers brushed against the soft petals. She felt nothing. Reaching into her pants' pocket, she pulled out a knife. The metal was cool against her palm. The blade sounded as it flashed, and she placed the cutting side low against the stem of the flower.

"I know you don't like that I've got an apartment in town," said Janice, "but that's what this has come to."

Leaning back against the bedroom wall, Phillip closed his eyes. A slow, troubled sigh escaped his lips.

"Besides," said Janice, "it'll be good for me. And it'll be good for the girls. I don't want them around your mother anymore."

"My mother?" Phillip narrowed his eyes at her, suspiciously.

"I don't like her," said Janice. "I don't like the way she looks at the girls."

"What do you mean?" said Phillip. "The way she looks at them?"

Janice stared at the floor. "She looks—she looks as if she—"

"Well, how does she look at them?" Phillip cried, exasperated with her dramatics.

"She looks like she wants to devour them!"

Janice's face was so distorted with fear and helplessness that Philip couldn't help but laugh. It was a cold, distant laugh that seemed to go on and on though it lasted only a few seconds.

"The only thing mother's ever devoured," he said, smiling, "is the food in front of her face."

"And what about all the bruises and welts she put on you as a boy?"

The smile left Phillip's face. "She wasn't that bad."

"Is that what old doctor Blevins said about her?" said Janice, sarcastically.

"That was only one time, Janice," said Phillip, eyeing her, sharply. "And it was only because she'd gotten too angry."

"And she never did it again, huh?"

Phillip shook his head, annoyed. "I should never have told you about it," he said. "I should've known you'd bring it up. And right here when it works out good for you."

A sigh of disgust escaped Janice's mouth. "Nothing about you works out good for me."

"On and on! On and on! It's good she's gone!"

Ornitha yelled at the sky and the birds and the flowers around her.

"All that arguing ain't good for the girls! How can they have a normal childhood when they're around that all the time?"

She had been kneeling on the ground for some time. Exhausted from the yelling and the burning sun, she sat back onto the grass and mopped her eyebrows and forehead with the tail of her shirt. Reaching to her head, the old woman carefully adjusted the dark blue scarf back over her natural gray spikes of hair.

"It's just the noontide," she said in a soft voice. "It makes everybody crazy."

She pulled a hot, mushy sandwich from a plastic bag in her pocket. She ate, gazing at the flowers neatly piled beside her. A smile came to her face. "Leigh Ann and Eleonora would love these."

Children love flowers, especially girls, she told herself. Boys like them, too, but they like other things more, like baseball and frogs and trucks. They're rough and tumble, so you have to be rough and tumble with them. Ornitha swallowed the last bite of her sandwich.

"It was cruel of Janice to mention that beating," she said. "It was cruel and unfair and shows what kind of woman she really is. Phillip would do well to be rid of her."

The old woman dabbed the tears quickly from her eyes. She would ask around town about Janice's new boyfriend. She



would find out for Phillip. It might even help in the custody battle, she reckoned. He'd get more time with his daughters then.

Straightening her legs out in front of her, Ornitha settled back into the pasture grass.

"It'd be nice if he'd get more time with Leigh Ann and Eleonora."

She stared at the clear stretch of sky above her head, her eyelids growing heavy...

The hawk, having just devoured a baby mouse, stretched her wings to catch the current that sailed her right over the highway again. The fields were endless, and the road continued up through the mountains, winding and straightening beneath the branches of the trees. A field of yellow flowers lay ahead. A few buzzards flew lazy circles above the field. The old woman who had been walking through the flowers was now lying restless on the ground. The buzzards circled lower. Balancing herself against the stillness of the air, the hawk let out a piercing scream as if to waken the woman.

Ornitha rose with a start. Her mouth was dry and the sun burned in her eyes. She sat still for a minute, getting her bearings. She looked down at her watch. Seven minutes after twelve.

"I would've sworn it'd been longer than that."

She had been dreaming of a hawk with brown and white feathers. It was telling her something, guiding her through some difficulty, some torment of her own. But what was it?

The old woman had to get up and move around. Her body let her do that slowly. She paced a few seconds, but could not remember the message she had received. Frustrated, she snatched the bouquet of flowers off the ground. She trudged through the grasses back towards the highway, the sun beating down on her head.

"You can remember clear back to when you was a child, Ornitha," she said aloud, wrenching open the heavy truck door. "Why can't you remember a dream from five minutes ago?"

Suddenly, she remembered that Janice would not be teaching next week. It was some kind of weeklong holiday. She couldn't remember if Janice would be out of town or not. Still, Janice would have errands to run or shopping to do. The old woman could keep Eleonore and Leigh Ann for her, though maybe not the whole time. Janice might not allow that, cruel as she was, but she couldn't deny a grandmother a little time with her granddaughters. Janice wasn't that cruel.

Ornitha hopped into the truck, arranging the flowers nicely on the seat beside her. She could come back to this same field next week and pick some flowers for the girls. She might even stop by the grocery store and get them some pink cupcakes, too. Girls just love that sort of thing. She smiled the whole time she thought about this.

The truck engine rumbled, and then leveled off to a steady rhythm. The tall grass lining the side of the road swayed as the truck sped forward. Soon, all was silent again save the clicking noise of the buzzards picking the dog's carcass clean.





Rumor, Boom, Bust.

Kandahar Air Field

by Joanna Grant

I heard an Australian soldier got in the poo pond and went swimming on a dare.
I heard the Australian soldier went swimming in the poo pond on a dare
and he got all burned up from the sewer chemicals they put in there to treat
the poo and he had to get medevaced back to Germany.
No he got dysentery.
No he died.
No he got burned and then he died.
Did you hear about the girl who had a party with drinking in the female barracks
and they caught her drunk in the bathroom and she said the guys she brought
back there raped her so she wouldn't get thrown out of the Army.
I heard about the guy who was sleeping up in the mods and I guess they left the door
unlocked so someone came in there and hit him over the head with a body
armor plate and raped him. They had to knock him out for the medevac to Germany.
Did you hear about the girl who got attacked outside the gym. They say the guys
were soldiers. American. She kicked their ass. Stabbed one of them in the face.
Now that's a fact. That girl was in my squad.
As far as rumors go, She's Pregnant is always good.
I heard you're pregnant. I think she's pregnant. I heard I'm pregnant. I heard he's pregnant.
When I was back in Salerno? I heard someone had a toilet baby. They found it in the portajohn.
If I had your baby, I'd put it in the portajohn too.
I heard they're tearing this place down. I heard they're building it up. I heard none of the
contractors will get their contracts renewed. You know they told Tom his time was up
and he had one day to pack up and get out. I heard we're getting five more years.
I heard a rumor we're going home.
I heard a rumor we're staying here.
I heard there's a member of the Taliban in class with us right now.
Yeah, you know the poo pond? Well this is what I heard. I heard the reason
that Australian jumped in and swam and got burned and died was
there's an MRAP down there at the bottom of all the poo, and in the
MRAP at the bottom of all the poo there's a safe, and in that safe
is money. A ton of money. Like doubloons and shit. And hash.
A whole fuckton of hash. But there's a curse.
Of *course* there had to be a curse. Like it's not enough for it to be hid under
twenty tons of shit.
He's a whore she's a whore you're a whore I'm a whore your mama's a whore—
Toilet baby. The rumors swirl just like the fine Afghan dust with its load
of fecal—I heard it's thirty percent powdered poo up here. The air. No matter
how hard we try to laugh it off we're in it, too—breathing it, scratching in it,



like that guy who dove in got burned and maybe died in it—hustling.
Making our bets. Quit smoking fuck it. I heard two tours here you're a goner. Lung cancer.
Fix the knee I just blew out hell no. That's one hundred percent disability there. I heard.
Gonna limp my way to motherfucking easy street. Someday. I heard.



Boy Come Home

by Julia Patt

The neighbor found them after the son had gone—she heard glass breaking and came over with her dead husband's pistol in her pocket. Robbers, she thought. What would she do? She didn't know; she just had the gun. But then she saw them. The woman and her husband sat on the stoop, the front door open behind them.

I'm trying to get him to the car, the woman explained. She wore a raincoat over a lacy nightgown. I tried, but I can't carry him. She put out her hands; they were small and soft looking. Manicured. There was—The boy. His boy.

She looked at the man. Back down at her hands.

Shouldn't you call an ambulance? The neighbor asked.

We can't, the woman said. Her eyes were as dark as a doll's. That's \$300.

The man lolled on the top step with his legs splayed. But those legs were all wrong. Crooked. Lumped. The woman held his arm like a child, tugging, as if she could cajole him into walking. Baby, she said. Baby, please. She shook him harder and her coat fell open and the neighbor could see the twin shadows of her aureoles through that nearly nothing nightgown.

Then the neighbor said, Here, let me help you. She knelt next to the man and put his arm over her shoulders. This close, she could smell him—the pain-sweat, the damp flannel smell from his shirt. No alcohol. She didn't know them, just waved at the mailbox sometimes, but she had always thought they were those kinds of people. Overgrown grass and peeling paint people.

The boy she'd seen more. He mowed her lawn. A sick-looking boy who always carried an aluminum baseball bat. She'd seen him practice, the whistle of the swing. How his hands would clench-unclench on the metal.

The woman got her feet under her and they pulled the man up between them. But neither of them were tall women—when they stepped forward, the man's legs dragged. He screamed. The neighbor had never heard a man scream and she started, almost dropped him on the lawn. She felt the weight of the gun in her pocket. Sorry, she said. Sorry.

They staggered down to the street with the man on their shoulders. Maybe from a distance, the neighbor thought, it would have looked like the happy end of a night together. A celebration gone long and late. She'd never even invited them over for coffee. The man's tears ran down his face and neck and dampened her collar.

There'd been a fight, hadn't there, a month or two ago. Doors slamming. The boy's smelly old car rumbled away one night. Drugs, the mailman confided. He's bad into it. A couple of Latino kids cut her grass now. What was his name? Toby? Tucker?

They got the man to the woman's car and tumbled him onto the seat and he was half in, half out. His eyelids drooped and his chin sagged towards his chest; probably he was going to pass out. Just as well. They lifted each leg and shifted them into the car, gentle as they could. Still.

Thank you, Lucrezia, the woman said. Thank you so much.

The neighbor blinked at her. She hadn't thought the woman knew her name. The two of them looked back at the house then, at the open door. There had been glass breaking. She'd heard it. What happened, she almost asked. Where is the boy. Instead she said, I'll close it up. You go ahead.

The woman thanked her again and got into the car. The neighbor stood on the curb. Then she went up to the house, to that slack-jawed door. She stood at the threshold of that house for a long time. And finally she went in.

In the den: two overturned chairs. A thick crack bolted down the coffee table. The television stared myopically at the room, and she could see where the plug had been ripped from the wall. The boy came home, she thought. Backpack looped over one shoulder; his baseball bat stuck out the top. The hood of his jacket pulled up. He was a quiet kid, the staring type.

Look, Dad, he'd said. I need some money.

What for, the man must have asked. He sat in the den watching television. The wife was in bed, asleep. Probably that perfect sleeping-pill sleep.



Please, Dad. I really need it, okay.

The man looked him, then, maybe. Maybe wanted to ask, what kind of trouble are you in? But he didn't, the neighbor was sure. Instead—Get the hell out of my house.

And the kid lost it a little, yanked the plug out of the wall. The man got angry, went after the kid, knocked the chairs over. Pushed him into the coffee table. You little shit, the man said. What are you gonna do, huh?

Fuck you, the kid sputtered. He got up and they moved down the dark, narrow hallway.

Half a dozen figurines were scattered across the floor. Flakes of ceramic cracked under the neighbor's shoes, and she picked up a dog. It had lost its front paws, once grounded on a green bit of lawn. There was the shelf where they all must have sat. Too young for the woman's tastes. Maybe left over from the man's first wife, the boy's mother, who the neighbor barely remembered. An unhappy woman. Dark-haired, not as pink as this new wife.

The man, she decided, swept the figurines to the floor; one shattered into white flakes.

It got ugly. Plaster dusted the walls. The boy, all full of whatever he was taking, had lifted the man up. Pushed him hard against those walls. The man hit him. There, the red spray of his bloody nose. One of them fell on the coffee table. Probably the man. He was getting older, no longer stronger than the boy. When he was down, the boy pulled the bat from his bag. Swung. Swung. The bat rang. The man's bones made dry-stick noises.

The woman was out of bed by then. Maybe she was screaming. The boy shook her, told her to shut the fuck up. She'll call the police, she said. Don't think she won't. His father groaned and bled on the floor. The boy looked and saw those broken up legs and his father's bruised face and then he ran.

He broke the kitchen window, she saw; the remaining shards snarled at her from the panes. And there were marks on the table from his shoes. That's how he got away, she thought, he crawled out the window, bits of glass in his palms and knees and he ran out into the woods that stretched behind the neighborhood. The neighbor sunk down in one of the kitchen chairs. He was out there now, she thought. She laid her husband's pistol down on the kitchen table, next to one of the boy's footprints.

She looked down at the broken dog figurine. Turned it over in her worn hands with their wax-paper skin. The rough broken edge of the paws bit at her thumb.

There, inscribed on the bottom in clumsy black marker—*Tyler*.



Large Flightless Bird

by Donna Vitucci

You stroll past Gibbon Island, hands in pockets, and whistling. Who whistles anymore? Not since *The Andy Griffith Show* have you heard such whistling, such on-key consistent tune. Your mouth purses toward execution, exhaling and inhaling, lungs bellowing; it's the trick to them loosening up and letting you in. What kid can't sometime be found singing, to sleep or to armor himself against fright or la-la-ing over a building task while he's maybe watching cartoons on the living room floor, and perhaps rubbing between his legs, mindless. It just feels good, you don't even think about it. Singing, touching. Remember, a pretty girl is like a melody?

A thousand howler monkeys, or so it seems. The dung of very large mammals around every corner, or so it smells. Something shitty propels through you, something circulates. You deftly step to the small one watching otters in the aquarium gloom, the stay-behind boy at the glass wall, the one who straggles, who loiters when his school group takes off toward the Bat House. The one who doesn't mind loneliness, the one who will allow, the one whose ears relax into your peculiar song.

Don't believe this will be a snap. It requires intelligence, precision, planning, and cajoling. You'd quit, you'd like to quit, God, you swear you would or will, but there's flooding through your brain stem, a sluice all the way down to your dick. Desire, as a froze river gripped by the thaw, it thunders so you're lucky you can hear yourself think. Is this thinking, or primal rush, where ramparts of decency cannot hold? Oh blather—you have never been decent. As a child you were shredding butterflies, trapping your hamsters, pulling other boys' pants down. You are breaking up, have ever been crashing against yourself. The tide, the tide. Your shoes move your feet. The cog awaits the crank. The earth must turn, and you have trailed him into daylight.

When the bird in its vast cage calls out, the sound cuts across your breastbone. You expect this among wild animals, but the child, he shrieks and shrinks back, nearly strikes you dead with his impact, his melon head at your thighs, the pleasure and the riot of it.

"Ho, young man." Your hands steady his shoulders, which looks like pure nothing to gawkers who have huddled around the cage. The call has sounded and the call has brought them running to find out what. The bird looks like a turkey and pheasant and ostrich, as if cobbled from many birds. It has the bony dinosaur helmet and wattles, it sports color and all-over feathers. Greater than an ostrich, it's taller than the boy by leaps.

You fold yourself and set lips to his pale ear in speaking to him and him alone the zoo's description posted there for educating: "Cassowary, a large flightless bird." You can't help infusing the read with a tinge of menace, the voice of *I'll tell you a scary story now, if you dare*.

The bird blinks. The child will thrill and collapse to you or ricochet away.

This one's wary, he's in-between. You feel electrons sparking on his skin, on his lovely chapped cheek.

Look at me, Look at me, you want to cry, but you say, "It's from Australia." No one can blame you for accepting the teachable moment and fitting it around you like the Emperor's New Clothes.

Everyone craves special attention. It's your ace in the hole, and you are the mold that appears alongside what's been left solitary on the fridge shelf. You sidle in; the temporary others have vamoosed to the next loud wild thing. A bird call in the midst of larger jungle animals has little holding power. Now it's just you and the boy. Is there nothing so unspoiled as the whites of this child's eyes?

You are it, you're the next live show. He's practically begging, though for what, he hasn't a clue.

You'd be crazy not to swivel and check for the law, for zoo emissaries, or even some competition. Where's the mother, the babysitter, the teacher? Where's the world and its chaperone?

"Lost, are you, bub?"

The boy snuffles. He hasn't words, his voice occluded by wet and the fear encountered at the center of the lonely maelstrom.



How can you make sport of that? How dare you take advantage?

"Small fry," you say, in the tone of melted butter. "Little one, we'll find who you need, we'll find them. Give us a name, sir, and we'll blast it overhead so everyone will hear, and they'll come, they'll all come running to rescue."

Your dick should be shrinking but in fact it is its own sovereignty over which you have never held sway, cumbersome when you try bending to boy-size. You're embracing him now, making yourself a shelter, *we're in this together, bub, and I won't dare leave until they appear.*

If they. Desire sharp as a granny's hatpin, but your grandmammy, the one who raised you, she wore no hats. Conjure her stick of memory: bib apron over denims she sewed together from scraps, how she buckled your blister-beat ass into the hard chair with her belt, your tongue curled like a moth ball in your mouth. Bare-headed bitch.

The child's snuffles are snotty, fists set to his streaming eyes, he's no more than kindergarten, and lacks any shame. He grubs onto your arm, is received into your coddling, and you have him then, like the road gains its blacktop, pressed on, glued in, all Venus-Fly-Trappy.

The locomotive wails.

"There's the train," you say, breathy and tender and promising fun, turning him round in your wide open jacket half to the approaching chug-lug, tumbling him from the view of anyone in-roading or half-questioning your pairing. "Shall we ride the train?" You chinkle two pockets full of change.

On board, the boy sits beside you—crying abrupted, the train allaying fear—and as his small thigh wedges yours, arises smells of applesauce and rubber. You bite your tongue to prevent keening, and what you get away with is humming, your body aquiver as the boy wags his head out the train's open window to peer at zebras and antelopes and rhinos below the trestle you travel across, a ride of one long benediction down into the Veldt. Were there space on the floor of this car you would kneel, you would worship the source of his yipping, strand your DNA inside his voice box. Even the dung smells sweet.

Thief in broad day, you whisk you two past camel rides along the back exit, to a place of supreme sadness and left-behinds. The bum there has the burn of the graveyard about him. You throw two dollars and say, "Get your own," sheltering the boy in the prime of your jacket.

He snarls, "Hustler," plucking the bills right out of the air.

Upon debarking the train, insanity approaches, and has brought its posse to pull your fairy story up by its roots. Everybody's a busybody these days. Here bee-lines the boy's teacher or parent, whatever, a woman who has missed him in the class count, someone who cares, heading up a crowd like the villagers stalking Frankenstein. They're looking for a boy, and besides that they don't know what.

He breaks free of you—that trusting apple-grip gone!—as he sings, "You found me!"

The teacher's long straight hair draws a curtain over his disheveled carrot top. There is squealing and braying, not animals now but folks jubilant, this joy circular and catching like fleas, the happy ending even strangers bask in as if they had played parts. Only the foolish would stick close, and so you begin to fade.

"Where'd you go?" the teacher cries, enveloping him, gobbling him, getting what's yours, your carrot soup, damnit, scoping the crowd. "Don't ever do that," she scolds. "Stay with us."

A man, huddling his wife and children—the "almost" inspires everyone to herd their chicks—he begins to clap, and his applause catches, inspiring the gawkers. The kid beams and fist-pumps and you're thinking he's not too innocent by half. You did not give him credit.

The commotion rises and then dies down into disperse, exit, the usual pull apart of everything, the world taffy and bending, no center to it, the earth falling from its axis so it's hard to even stand with your old football knees. Behind the camels your heart once more begins to find its pace, but then the Cassowary screams and the whole joint jumps, the bleating of children driving a stake through you right there along the service road.

Outside the zoo, but you can still see the camels down on their knees, and the little ones lined up, waiting. A tiny blond thing, a girl with a Dutch-boy haircut, bends her face to the drinking fountain, her pink cowboy boots shooting off their glittery stitch-



ing. Until this moment you had not realized the sun.

The bum again, bent and shadowed against a building. "It don't hafta be a boy," he says.

You hiccup. "What do you know about it?"

He sucks a last off the cig, then bounces its embers at the street. He lifts his emptied-out hands to praise Jesus. You could take him to your apartment, clean him up—you've done that; or you could roll him—you've done that, too. You could snap his twig arms, but that would just give him two more good reasons for begging. Your grandmammy taught you one thing for certain: you can't rub out a haint if a haint's not ready to go.

Halfway home you stop in Pearson's Market for a Coke, guzzle a quarter of it, pour in your juice and slam the rest back by the freeze case. Too many jack-hammers idling around the steps on their cells, too many jack-in-a-boxes with heads stuffed up, the balloon necks and the lad-di-dahs. A patrol car slides by the neighborhood jam with alarms off but its windows down and all the woofers shut their tweets. Twenty pairs of eyes plus the goobers in the Monte Carlo in the alley with the tinted windows shift with the law until the law paddles on. Your feet are stinging in your shoes. You must have been running up to this point, you do have the ring of sweat on you. Huffing and thirst.

"King of the Mountain." The bum has followed you back here. Pearson's lighting puts a fearsome shine on the crust around his mouth and nose, his indiscriminate layers of wear. "No good if they don't catch you in the act, eh?" He winks with his non-walleyed eye. "We all Boy Scouts here. We the mother lovin' jim-jamboree."

Grandmammy said, "You do us proud or you do us dirty," and then she sold you to Mr. McCobb, this in 1973, in America.

Pearson shouts out, "Back there, you buyin' anything?"

The mini-mart world in the ceiling mirror cripples and bends, hacking at your true height, and the bum so midget-ized he could fit in your pocket. Him and a pack of cupcakes.

You smile at Pearson as you pass by his counter, no purchases, your concealed thumb and forefinger grinding the bum like a hard piece of mud off the tread of a tractor. Pearson ducks his beard to his chest in fare-thee-well and so then you're into the dusk of evening, the smell of cold sidewalk and weeds past their prime assaulting you. Ho. There's the damn bum squinting through the exhaust of the idling Monte Carlo, the shape shifter. Be it known: he's your token from the past, your scrapbook, your ticket in, your signpost. He ain't letting you go, no which way. You take to the street, not at all sure he'll catch up, but meanwhile humming and walking and scrabbling in your pants pocket for yourself for comfort.





Following the Snow Leopard

by Barbara Wiedemann

Living in a small western town
shadowed by a mountain
she's caught up in mundane tasks
grocery shopping, laundry,
social chitchat
but when she lifts her eyes
away from the ordinary
there the mountain
a jagged peak of snow and rock
is still in sunlight
and she knows
that's where she's going,
where she must go.
All she has to do
is follow the trail out of town.



Magical Realism Comes to the Desert

by Barbara Wiedemann

With unexpected rain
in southwest Colorado
near the hamlet of Dove
the mundane gives way to the magical
and there it is
a pink horse
glorious in its pinkness,
a horse which might once have been white
before it rolled in the red earth
but only might have been,
one can't ever be sure.



32-B

by Gail Peck

It's 1957, and I am in the woods
at night with Glenn Dunwoody who's slipping
his hand up my sweater. I'm eleven,
and know this is what is called
feeling someone up. Apparently
it wasn't about the movie date,
but the getting here, and I now wish
I was in love with Butch Freeman—
puppy love my mother calls it.

Stacked built
bazooms ta ta's

and the only color bra I can find
is white, though there are pastel panties
with the names of the days of the week.

No one has yet thought up Victoria's Secret—
lime-green strapless, rose-red push-ups,
underwire, and the Stars are naturally endowed—
showing cleavage and bare backs,
holding cigarettes between their long fingers.
Smoke is in my house, smoke is everywhere.
I try it too, one big puff, and feel
like my chest will explode.

I have what the boys desire to touch,
what the girls are dreaming of,
but I don't want this sign of maturity,
so fasten my bra in the last hook
that later boys and men will try to undo,
each acting like an expert, but fumbling,
fumbling until I take care of the damn thing myself,
and the world falls into their hands,
and my nipples become erect, and I am pitched
forward into the sexuality I've been warned against,
If you give in he won't . . ., and I am in control
though spinning under the weight.



“Dear Creature of Event”

after Laura Riding

by Jane Satterfield

For days we could not get a connection. *I was below 14th & Canal when*—“Waiting, now, for a ride—will call from a land-line.” Smoke. Frozen zone. Endless drifting of debris. I am blank most of the time. The clock, the desk, my small cameo. *I was below 14th & Canal when an old friend*—her story: my heart is a polished stone. Magazines, CDs, books—feeding cats when evening falls. Time and its mausoleum of hope and desire . . . I remember a poem in the shape of a river, a rose. Nights in Virginia. Our luminous time. Static & then “I’m losing the line.” Film on the cutting floor before we connect. “Hear the protesters out in the square?” *Dulce et decorum est*. You don’t get that everyday: Virginia & our luminous time . . . Sheet lightning. Stars doused in dark heavens . . . You showed me the grounds as if they were the world.



Moving Water

for Maeve

by Julie Hensley

From the start, you knew
how to fool us: surviving
in separate parts, past
the days we checked off the calendar,
beginning before we were permitted
to anticipate you. Our joy—
that the body knew
better than doctors or books,
better than our own indulgent despair,
knew, before we did,
when the switch was thrown,
and at the cellular level
hope could gleam once more.

*Let that word include
you, let it include God, let it
include desire, as well
as desire's quiet child,
let it include the parts of all
of us, your father and I, all
of us existing as pure
light, as moving water.*

That you would come quickly
should have been clear.
For one thing, there was no time
for photographs, no weekly record
like the one chronicling your brother's growth,
black Sharpie on white card stock,
make-shift sign beneath an ever growing bump,
only the cast attempted weeks after
the date recommended, so that you dropped
even as your father and brother, trying
to suspend growth in a perfect tableau,
smoothed strips of wet gauze
across my greased middle.

*Perhaps every second child knows
she must hurry, knows surprise
is the only way to deconstruct
the delicate balance which precedes her.
Now you wield the same
power, running as I call
your name, sliding*



*behind filmy curtains,
folding yourself beneath
the bathroom counter.*

The afternoon of your birth,
while your brother poured warm
bathwater over my belly, outside
an early thaw was brewing.
On the way to the hospital,
sunlight split February wide open,
casting a luminescence over the pastures—
everywhere, cattle coming in to feed.

At that rural hospital,
submerged in the birthing pool,
this time, I knew
I would have to give myself over,
the same way, once, as a toddler
splashing along the edge of the Atlantic,
when my hand slipped out of my father's,
I gave myself over to drowning,
hung between worlds as foam churned overhead.

*Don't forget we are
the same. I know
your wet rush, girl child,
have ridden it myself—
turning clothing aside
like the pages of a book,
raising my thumb to hail unknown
cars, opening my mouth
to one boy and then another,
to someone's hash pipe, to words
I wish I hadn't. Why
are the regrets of my
past already poured
into those of your future?*

In the end, water loosened my bones—
not the stream filling the tub and steaming
the mirror, cradling that body no longer mine,
not even the vial of holy water sealed
inside my suitcase, although I would anoint
your dark head later that evening,
but those mysterious currents we already shared.
Before them, I opened suddenly
as I couldn't for your brother,



like the calm surface of a lake
pricked by a barn swallow, by a shard
of thrown glass. I rippled wide
so that you might shine forth, tinkling
with spring-melt through the eaves.

By the time we drove you home,
just two days later,
the creeks had risen past their banks,
and the route back could never be
the same.

Just look how the roadside blossoms
in your presence, Jonquils and Forsythia
shattering winter's gray fence lines.





Love Your Bosom; It's a Holy Thing

by Cindy Small

Joan's Exquisite Lingerie Shop in New Orleans, Louisiana, was all about fantasy, enchantment and hookers. Grandma Joan, the owner, spent sixty-plus hours a week creating this X-rated depository of underclothing for the secretive. Instead of stirring matzo ball soup laden with chicken fat at home, she sold Tra La La panties. This small shop housed wide showcases spilling out with garter belts, brocade hose, French-style panties all decorated with handmade bows - thousands and thousands of bows: red, gold, black, and, of course, chartreuse. In keeping with the high standards of retail, my grandmother greeted each hooker and gentleman as though they were shopping at Tiffany's. Well-heeled gentlemen, arm-in-arm with Bourbon Street hookers, the likes of The Pussy Cat Girl and Blaze Starr, were all frequent visitors of my grandmother's shop.

"Velcome my dear. How are you?" Grandma said in her Viennese/Hebrew/Bavarian dialect.

"I get you a vonderful panty for your lady. Ve hab only the best. French lace, soft on the body. All womens love our merchandise. Come...let me show you. Ve fix you up and your lady be very happy. You be happy, too; she be sexy; all goot." Grandma convinced the customer. After this conversation, no human ever escaped without a purchase after entering the shop. Pressure to buy was in high gear and my grandmother was the Jaws of Life regarding porn attire. Joan was the hydraulic rescue tool that extricated the victim — mean customer. They had no choice but to buy something.

The allure of nippleless bras and gold lamé stretch pants were among the incredibly seducing frocks sold in Grandma's store. During my elementary school years, I was delivered by Yellow Cab each day after school to work in this adult sexual fantasyland. Watching Grandma dancing to old-fashioned Jewish strip songs in the back stockroom of the store while shaking her hips to Marvin Gaye's "Sexual Healing" substituted for my homework. She was quite the multi-tasker.

Should you be lucky enough to be escorted into the circular, heavily-draped red and green flowered dressing room in the lingerie store, Grandma Joan appeared on the ready to rearrange, wiggle and shake a size 44DD bra into a size 32B. In her thick Viennese accent sprinkled with Yiddish slang, she commanded customers to stuff their breasts into infinitesimal bras, calling it the "shake and bake" technique. Joan placed her hands on the shoulders of each customer, made them bend over and shook their breasts like a salt shaker into bras. Body parts settled randomly while the bosom rose upward and proudly became established into its new home. Grandma's roly-poly body draped in a curvaceous sequined "party-dress-of-the-day" plus a five-foot frame would step a few feet away from the customer in the dressing room, jeweled fingers on hips, feeling like The Queen of Breasts.

"Madam, you look fabulous. The mens will love you! There's nothing to be afraid of. Stick out your bosom *big* and be proud. Your bosom is your crown!" Grandma yelled.

"Well, yes," said the usual victim, I mean "customer." "It does feel a little tight...but...I'll get used to it...I... guess."

"What you say? Don't be so negative. Of course you get used to it. Love your bosom; it's a holy thing," demanded Joan of the customer.

"Gee, I do look sexy, don't I?" And so a quick purchase was always swiftly maneuvered at the giant cash register. Joan had the manipulation factor.

The womb of the "brothel" store was located in the back room of Joan's shop. Behind glass showcases, a solid wooden door led to a long, claustrophobic hallway with a squat ceiling. There was an oval desk and an adding machine with yellowed numbers. A low-slung maple desk was shoved to the left in a tight corner of the back room. On top of the desk was a cotton-candy pink Olivetti typewriter drowning in carbon paper and littered with pink-and-black letterhead, "Joan's French Lingerie."

Shelves stacked with hundreds of five-by-seven gold gift boxes housing lingerie sets were eye level. The labels, handwritten by Joan, appeared in a kind of Viennese hieroglyphic and had titles like "PRETTY BABY," "SWEET DOLL," "PERSIAN DELIGHT," "LOLITA," "TEMPTATION," "FRENCHY," and "TRA-LA-LA." Large gold boxes filled with nippleless bras, copious amounts of tiny bottles of glue for nipple applications and wads of fishnet hose were stacked to the ceiling. Long shelves bursting with long strands of white tissue paper filled shelves. Each gift box had been previously stuffed with tissue paper and on the ready, just in case there was a whirlwind of customers.

To the right of the stockroom hall was a flat gray brocade "fainting" couch propped against a wall. This was reserved strictly for Joan when her nerves were shot and normally where she ended up if it was a day without customers. Or if



a customer insisted on a refund, she was likely to collapse. To the right of the stockroom hall was a flat gray brocade “fainting” couch propped against a wall. This was reserved strictly for Joan when her nerves were shot and normally where she ended up if it was a day without customers. Or if a customer insisted on a refund, she was likely to collapse. To the very end of the dark hall were floor-to-ceiling ledges stacked with a huge inventory of gold gift boxes crammed with lingerie inventory. All stacked behind the ancient toilet from hell.

Grandma had strict toilet rules. This prehistoric rusty shrine had no bolts to anchor it to the ground and unless you only discharged dribbles of urine, you were in deep trouble with Grandma. God forbid if you felt a rumble in your belly. Grandma Joan would immediately send you next door toward the Roosevelt Hotel for relief. Repeat the same location if you felt queasy. Joan insisted that Number Two would waif through the air-conditioning vents thereby forcing customers outside. “Outside” meaning no money and no business and more time spent on the fainting couch. The shop toilet also had a mind of its own while only accepting three sheets of toilet paper at a time. Any more paper and the toilet would erupt in tsunami waves sloshing down the floor of the inventory room. God forbid. Joan would drop everything, leaving a customer unattended and run with her industrial-sized mop heaving huge buckets of mop water to the street. The event was terrifying when she was armed with that bucket. All tour buses innocently parked with tourists would be splashed with toilet water.

Just as Number Two was not allowed in Grandma’s store toilet, refunds in my grandmother’s store were completely out of the question — with one exception. The only time in the history of the store when a refund scheme didn’t work for Joan involved a prominent New Orleans judge, who happened to be a famous New Orleans drag queen caught between sex-change operations. The judge refused to leave until she received her money back on a crotchless panty. There she stood with red cat-eye glasses, mandarin-orange tight skirt and blonde wig tipped to the side. While throwing her cat-eye glasses on the counter, large man-hands flailing, Adam’s apple quivering, she yelled, “I don’t want to hear shit about your refund policy.”

Joan promptly refunded her money, but not without retaliation.

“What you say – you crazy?!? You have no right to wear my merchandise! Go buy something cheap at the Woolsworths!” Joan screamed at the top of her cigarette-soaked lungs.

At lunch each day, Joan’s ninety-year old brother, Edward, sat in a tiny corner in back of the store and performed all secretarial tasks. For fifty-one years this was his lunch hour away from his real job as a Sears’s sales associate selling washing machines. He absolutely loathed working in Joan’s shop, but constantly fearful of his sister’s temper he was afraid to resign. He performed all accounting duties, inventory control, human resource issues and advertising; but most of all hated that damn pink Olivetti typewriter. The typewriter felt like a solid piece of concrete on his back and represented everything he hated in life. As a confirmed heterosexual bachelor, Ed hated the merchandise, it made his stomach woozy and working for his sister was total fire-ass hell. But fear kept him plastered in the back of the lingerie store during his lunch hour for fifty-one years.

Spools of black flimsy ink ribbon always jammed the Olivetti typewriter leaving Ed with ink-soaked hands while he waited on customers in the afternoons at Sear’s. It was his permanent tattoo, a reminder of his hellish life. Always suited up in a tie and Hart & Schaffer suit, he sat in a hot, cramped space, among sex toys, bustiers and packaged trousseau sets. Ed never complained. He even went to the corner deli daily every day fetching creamed pickled herring, saltine crackers and vanilla cream soda for the shop’s employees and remained loyal and invisible. I only knew he was working at the store when I saw the outline of his top hat shift through the ceiling shadow across the room. The lingering smell of Cherry Hill tobacco lightly filtered the air as he tip-toed toward his assigned desk chair. We only waved at each other and fear of conversation always appeared on his face and I knew not to get him in trouble with Grandma.

“Uncle Eddy, you OK today?” I would say to him.

“Fair to partly cloudy; it’s never a good day, Cindy; life is hell,” was his standard answer.

“Anything new with you, Uncle Eddy?”

“Nothin’s ever new. Always the same. Guess it’s better than bad news,” he answered in the same monotone fashion.

“You gotta look at the glass always full, Uncle Eddy,” trying to encourage him.

“But, Cindy, there’s never a glass. Just a world of bustiers.”



Journey to Yânû

by Janie Dempsey Watts

On her third day in the Great Smoky Mountains, it was time for Serena to go home, but she refused to leave until she saw a bear. Standing in the visitors' center parking lot, Serena planted her flip flops on the hot asphalt by the passenger door and appealed to her older sister, June, over the weathered rooftop of the Jeep.

"Remember that woman we met on the nature trail? What she told us about seeing the mama and baby bear?" asked Serena.

"I don't care about bears. We need to get down the mountain before dark," said June, jangling her car keys for emphasis. Then she jerked open the door, slid in behind the wheel, pulling her toned legs in behind her. Serena ducked her head through the open window and continued.

"She couldn't stop crying when she saw the bears," said Serena. "Remember?"

"Probably a nut case," said June. She put the key in the ignition and started the engine. "Get in." Serena eased her ample self onto the car seat and closed the door. She did not put on her seat belt, but instead gently placed her hand on June's firm forearm.

"If we leave now we'll have enough time to drive the Cade's Cove loop," said Serena. "The woman said she saw the mama and baby bears at dusk."

"We drove the loop yesterday and there were no bears. Let's go home," said June. She pulled her arm away from her sister's grasp and shifted into reverse. "And get on your belt." Feeling like five instead of 25, Serena snapped her belt in place. June backed out the car, headed toward the exit. The coughing began. Choking, gasping coughs emanated from Serena, a coughing spasm that she could not control.

Serena reached into her quilted purse, pulled out her asthma inhaler, sucked in deep, dramatic puffs. June stopped the car at the exit sign and turned to face Serena.

"Oh, I see, so if we don't go look for bears, you'll have an asthma attack?" she said. "Give me a break."

Serena talked between coughs. "The whole point-- in coming-- was to-- see bears-- we haven't."

"Your point, not mine. I came to tube in the creek before going back to classes." A horn tooted behind them. June held out her arm and waved the other car around.

"With my allergies-- I can't come back-- for another year," said Serena. "Molds in the fall, pollens in the spring--"

"Bears hibernating in winter?"

"Exactly," said Serena. She took a deep breath, and continued. "When we see the bear, I'll get a shot for you to post on your wall. You could put it next to the one I took of you floating down the creek in your magenta bikini." Serena paused, waiting for her sister's mind to absorb this bit of information. A year older, June was athletic and pragmatic but not a deep thinker, unless you counted her intense discussions of celebrities' love lives. Serena was a softer, rounder person, and as their mother had said, a dreamer with fuzzy edges. Serena had been afraid to ask exactly what that meant, but she preferred to think of it as a compliment, in contrast to her sister's sharper edges.

June shifted the car into drive and moved toward the exit, and the road sign that pointed one way to Cade's Cove and the other, toward home.

"I'll make a deal with you, but only if you can get your asthma under control. I don't want to have to explain to Mom why you choked to death. We'll go straight to Cade's Cove and spend exactly one hour looking. Then we'll leave for home."

"But--"

"Take it or leave it. That's the deal."

"Okay, fine," said Serena. June clicked on a Pitbull C.D. and upped the volume, her signal that she wanted some quiet. Serena settled back in her seat and knew it was best to remain silent. She had won, sort of. Once they got to the cove, a lush valley ringed by mountains, and June caught a glimpse of real bears, she would want to stay longer, Serena was sure of it. June would be impressed by their size and their strength, Serena by their magic.

As the Jeep headed down the highway under a canopy of trees and alongside a cool rushing creek, Serena closed her eyes and remembered a story she had read. Many years ago a Cherokee boy lived in the Smokies with his parents. Every morning he left home to stay all day in the mountains. Although his parents tried to reprimand him, he continued to spend most of his time in the mountains, only coming back to the clan after dark. Long brown hair began to sprout out all over his body and his parents asked him why he preferred the forest, why he would not eat meals at home with them? Food



was plentiful in the woods, the boy said, and soon he would be leaving them to stay there all the time. He convinced his parents to join him. The parents sought advice from the head of their clan and discussed moving to the woods with their son. Holding a council to discuss the situation, clan leaders decided everyone would go to the woods to live where food was plentiful and without much work. Clan members fasted for seven days, grew hairier and set out for the mountains. There they turned into yânû, or bears. They told hunters not to be afraid to kill them because as yânû, they would live always.

Although she didn't care for the part about fasting, Serena liked the notion of a human turning into a bear and living life as another creature. Forever. Since reading the story, she had been as drawn to bears as they were to honey, although she had never seen one in person.

On the Cade's Cove one-way road, the old Jeep pattered past pioneer homes, churches, barns, and farmland. As the road was about to take them through an area of tall oak trees, Serena grabbed June's arm and pointed to cars stopped by the side of the road. People stood by cars aiming their cameras at a grove of trees.

"Bears!" said Serena. She grabbed the camera and started opening the door.

"Wait till I park!" said June. She eased in behind a van. Before she could roll to a stop, Serena got out. Huffing and puffing, she walked past the throng of people and squeezed under a barbed wire fence.

"What's she doing?" asked someone in the crowd.

Slowly, and attempting to walk lightly, she moved over to stand beneath a magnificent oak. Looking up into the branches, she saw a dark, bulky form moving at the top. A bear. With the leaves obscuring her view, she could not see it so well. When she moved over to get a better look, her heel wobbled over a small depression in the ground. She moved her foot over slightly until she found firmer footing. She smelled it, an earthy, musty overpowering scent, and then she saw it. The bear was high above her looking down.

With his light-colored nose, deep brown eyes and turned-up lips, and his almost human-looking face, the bear drew her in. They locked eyes, and in that moment, Serena felt the story about the Cherokee clan turning into bears, yânû, to be true.

A loud buzzing noise swelled up from the ground beneath her. Hot wires of pain stung her bare toes, her fleshy calves. She kicked off her flip flops, jerked her knees up and down in the air, trying to move away from the yellow jacket swarm. She succeeded only at dancing in place. As the venom from hundreds of yellow jackets overcame her, Serena collapsed on the soft dirt under the tree where the insects had built their nest in the ground. Her throat tightened and swelled. She gasped for air.

From what seemed far away, she heard her sister's screams. Using her last bit of energy, she turned her face upward and looked into the bear's deep brown eyes once again. A light breeze rustled through the leaves. A chill swept over her.

Then it happened. She was not scared and it did not hurt. Transformation took only a moment, but Serena knew it was forever.



Association Time at the Blue Ridge Women's Correctional Facility

for Vicky 1962--2010

by B.A. Goodjohn

Deaf Brenda's telling us about the time
her husband slammed her with the cockatiel's
cage, how sound closed down that night,
and yet her memory holds the parrot's scream.
She recalls slow feathers—tiny gray curls—
landing on her yellow fun-fur slippers.

We lean in: she's telling our story and we love
how they all start happy with sass and drinks.
She threw his sorry arse outside, piled furniture
against the door, then took her whiskey
and the kids to bed, slept sound despite
the ricochet of threats against the trailer's siding.

There is no recollection of clubbing him
with the iron, but there it was —bloody
and shining—on the deck. "What can I say?"
she said, her yard full of police and plastic toys,
hands already clasped behind her back.
"Drink brings a crazy bitch to fuck up my life."

My turn for tales, but I'm just here for plain old
DUI. So I tell the girls of Rita, Patron Saint of
Suffering, whose mouth was home to bees
that buzzed behind her teeth, but left her tongue
unstung, a saint I'd forgotten till Deaf Brenda,
described her tinnitus as bee song.

The rec room hums and we're all lost
to joining drunken dots of our own
blackened-out biographies. We're haunted
by mouths that have always swarmed with bees,
homesick for a time when we were too blessed
—or young—to know the treachery of swallowing.



HUNGER

by Agnieszka Stachura

He took her to Wendy's afterwards.
She wasn't hungry,
but she wanted the company,
so she sat,
still cramping,
in the hard plastic booth
alongside the other hard plastic booths
in the busy, chilly room.
Noise floated above her, and the smell of grease.
He placed their order at the counter
while she watched a young mother
spoonfeed her child
beneath a sign thanking them all
in advance
for not leaving a mess.



The Arts in America

by Wendy Vardaman

My mother gave me the baby quilt brightening my blue
Wisconsin wall: her grandmother, Allie Irene Brown Blake,
made it for her from irregular-sided silk fabric
slips pointing different directions, piecing seasons, remnants, continents:
summer polka dotting next to heavy winter
crepe, next to dogwood that must have bloomed in her Arkansas
yard and on her hand-stitched yardage the same day
in Russellville, scrap of town where Allie's family moved

from Alabama with her girl-mother, Catherine Ella Bates,
Confederate soldier-father, Alexander W., and what to call
the people he once owned? The woman who helped raise
Allie? Taught her to sew, to scrimp and make it sing, to quilt
in strips, to raise twelve children and bury ten of them, to salvage
their children when her own died, and I don't know a piece of her name.



Compass Points

by Wendy Vardaman

Returning to Arkansas at 10—
the direction of Grandmother drawing
 my father back to Sunday
 suppers around her shiny Formica
 table set with gold-rimmed plates
 and single forks;
 of pot roast so
 soft it never missed
 the knife;

 of napkin white
 noise on that
 cul-de-sac, stack
 of paper-wrapped Wonder
 Bread at my father's right,
 the bowl of whipped
 potatoes set at his left;

the direction of Mother
 on her one day off:
her *what can I get*
 you? Her *I'll clean up.*

The way every ask made
 them both stand up—
 while my father pushed
 off to watch the game from the couch

 while I hunched over
 the open book in my lap
and searched for my place.



A Visit with the Alchemist

by Elizabeth Landrum

Outside, the sign
reads, "We buy gold".
Inside, my hands
clutch silk, felt, and plastic
bags brimming
with bracelets, rings, pins,
spoons, coins, necklaces...
a medley of heritage,
history, and hope.
I take a number and sit
with my mix of suspense,
sorrow and shame,
stirred with glee and sleaze,
and others just like me,
clasping our aspirations
and metals someone
once deemed precious.

A gentle voice
calls "number eight".
With eyes and feet
fixed on the floor,
I deposit a glittering mass
on the glass.
I watch the man's hands
move with a confidence
I cannot share.
He sorts the pieces into piles,
gives some the acid test,
pushes others away,
places a mound on the scale,
strikes a calculator, then
scribbles digits
on a yellow sheet.



I couldn't trace his face
or name his age.
I am focused on numbers and
my mother's bracelet:
gold charms, my father's gifts.
They toasted trips to foreign lands,
celebrated the arrival of each child,
their five "zero" anniversaries,
and her birthday...
a 14 carat calendar of May,
the fifteenth day filled
with a diamond chip.
These trinkets, her treasures.
How long since
we measured those pleasures
by the dose of her tears?

The man is talking
of weather. He asks
where I live,
but I can't hear words.
I can only catch the clink of rings,
beautiful bands, artist-designed,
polished
with vows and promises,
tarnished
by the broken ones.
He weighs their worth,
decides their fate,
makes way for the melt
and meld. And after returning
to their original state,
they will be remade,
infused with newer meanings.
They'll tell another's story,
then again
be left behind.

He hands me a check,
moves on to number nine.



Time Capsule

by Laura Sullivan

Between sheetrock and lath,
in the rattle of pipes and
the griping of floorboards,
hear hints of who lived here
before, the ones who just knew
the kitchen wasn't working
for them so took turns
swinging a sledgehammer,
heaving debris out the side door,
laughing as she finished off
the south wall with a judo kick
that opened up so much space
and endless possibilities.
The ones who built a column
to hold up the weight of the house
once borne by the old claustrophobic wall
then plastered a time capsule inside,
so confident in what would endure.

It will take another sledgehammer
to reveal what they wanted to preserve
within that load-bearing post:
recordings of wild piano trills,
strains of Saturday at the Met
vibrating the transom sill, Eliot recited
with the catharsis of confession
amid some ambient thubbing
of cat paws on hardwoods and tension
of the screen door opening too wide
then exhaling with a smack against the sill.

All wedged between the ribs
of this house, a record
of what was once whole
now aspiring to the last word.





ANNE BAILEY holds an MFA in book arts from the University of Alabama and a MA (Creative Writing) in English from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Her most recent work is "Cold Stone, White Lily," a suite of poems written from the point of view of a 14th Century anchoress, a solitary urban recluse in the Christian tradition.

TABITHA BOZEMAN lives in Rainbow City, AL, with her husband, three children and two dogs. She enjoys reading, writing and finger painting with her babies, and on rainy days she can be found curled up with her laptop and a cup of coffee, or building forts in the living room with her kids. Her poetry has been published in Southern Women's Review and the Birmingham Arts Journal. Follow her adventures as a writer-mom at inkinmyveins.com, or on her Facebook page.

BARBARA BROOKS, author of "The Catbird Sang" and "A Shell to Return to the Sea" chapbooks, is a member of Poet Fools. Her work has been accepted in Chagrin River Review, The Foundling Review, Blue Lake Review, Granny Smith Magazine, Third Wednesday, Shadow Road Quarterly, Indigo Mosaic and on line at Southern Women's Review, Poetry Quarterly, and Big River Poetry among others. She currently lives in North Carolina with her dog.

VALENTINA CANO is a student of classical singing who spends whatever free time either writing or reading. Her works have appeared in Exercise Bowler, Blinking Cursor, Theory Train, Cartier Street Press, Berg Gasse 19, Precious Metals, A Handful of Dust, The Scarlet Sound, The Adroit Journal, Perceptions Literary Magazine, Welcome to Wherever, The Corner Club Press, Death Rattle, Danse Macabre, Subliminal Interiors, Generations Literary Journal, A Narrow Fellow, Super Poetry Highway, Stream Press, Stone Telling, Popshot, Golden Sparrow Literary Review, Rem Magazine, Structo, The 22 Magazine, The Black Fox Literary Magazine, Niteblade, Tuck Magazine, Ontologica, Congruent Spaces Magazine, Pipe Dream, Decades Review, Anatomy, Lowestof Chronicle, Muddy River Poetry Review, Lady Ink Magazine, Spark Anthology, Awaken Consciousness Magazine, Vine Leaves Literary Magazine, Avalon Literary Review, Caduceus, White Masquerade Anthology and Perhaps I'm Wrong About the World. Her poetry has been nominated for Best of the Web and the Pushcart Prize. You can find her here: <http://carabosseslibrary.blogspot.com>.

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B.A. GOODJOHN moved from London to Lynchburg, Virginia in 1999 and fell under the spell of the Blue Ridge. Her work has appeared in a variety of publications including The Texas Review, Cortland Review, Zone 3, and Connecticut Review. In 2011, she won Reed magazine's Edwin Markham poetry prize. She teaches English and directs the Writing Program at Randolph College in Virginia. www.bagoodjohn.com.

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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 partner 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.

IRENE LATHAM is a poet and novelist from Birmingham, Alabama. She has served as poetry editor for Birmingham Arts Journal since 2003, and her third volume of poetry *The Sky Between Us* is forthcoming from Blue Rooster Press in 2014. Visit her at irenelatham.com.

KATHLEEN BREWIN LEWIS was born in Savannah, GA and currently lives in Atlanta with her family. Her work is forthcoming or has appeared in *Yemassee*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Heron Tree*, *Foundling Review*, *Deep South*, and *The Southern Poetry Anthology Vol. V: Georgia*, among others. A graduate of Wake Forest University, she has an MA in Professional Writing from Kennesaw State University. Senior editor of *Flycatcher*, she was nominated for a Pushcart Prize by *Deep South* in 2012. She's never lived anywhere north of Washington, DC.

KERRY MADDEN-LUNSFORD is an author of teen novels and a professor of creative writing at the University of Alabama in Birmingham. She is editor of the literary magazine, *Poemmemoirstory*. Kerry Madden's novel *Offsides* (William Morrow) was selected by the New York Public Library in their 1997 "Books for the Teen Age" list. Her book *Writing Smarts* (American Girl Library) helps kids write stories and poetry. Her novel *Gentle's Holler* (starred Kirkus and PW reviews) became a PEN USA Finalist in Children's Literature and was included in the New York Public Library's "100 Books for Reading and Sharing" and the Chicago Public Library's "Best of the Best" lists for 2005. Her book, *Up Close: HARPER LEE* was selected as one of the Best Kirkus Books of 2009 for Young Adult Readers.

DEANA NANTZ is the author of *Fits of Wrath and Irony*, a chapbook, published by Finishing Line Press in 2012. She holds an MFA in creative writing from Eastern Kentucky University's Bluegrass Writer's Studio and teaches English in London, KY where she lives. Her short fiction, poetry, and literary reviews can be found in *Fiddleblack*, *Fried Chicken and Coffee*, *Paradigm*, *Jelly Bucket*, and *Aurora*.

JULIA PATT is a Maryland native and resident. She has also called Virginia and North Carolina home. She holds degrees from Sweet Briar College and the MFA program at UNC Greensboro, where she was a fiction editor for *The Greensboro Review* and a workshop leader in the Write On Greensboro community program. Her fiction has most recently appeared in such publications as *Phantom Drift*, *The Fiction Desk*, and *Spark: A Creative Anthology*. Currently, she attends the Graduate Institute at St. John's College and edits *7x20: a journal of twitter literature*.

GAIL PECK is an award-winning author who's published six books of poetry: *Counting The Lost*, *From Terezin*, *Thirst*, *Foreshadow*, *Drop Zone*, and *New River*. She has published numerous poems in various journals. Her work has appeared in *The Southern Review*, *The Greensboro Review*, *The Louisville Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Cave Wall*, and *Nimrod*. Poems have also appeared in the anthologies *Word and Witness: 100 Years of Poetry in North Carolina* (Carolina Academic Press); *Uncommon Place: An Anthology of Louisiana Poets* (LSU Press); *After Shocks: The Poetry of Recovery for Life-Shattering Events* (Sante Lucia Books).

CAROLE POPPLETON-SCHRADING grew up in Birmingham, AL, and holds degrees from the University of Alabama at Birmingham and the University of Illinois at Chicago. Her creative work has appeared in *Language Review*, *Diverse Voices Quarterly* and *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*; her professional writing has been featured in numerous academic publications on education, writing and issues related to teaching English as a second language. She currently teaches at York College of Pennsylvania, and even though she now lives north of the Mason-Dixon line, she will always consider herself a southern woman.

CHIVAS SANDAGE'S first book of poems, *Hidden Drive* (Antrim House, 2012), was a finalist for the 2012 ForeWord Book of the Year Awards in Poetry and nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She is a contributing writer for *The New Civil Rights Movement*, and has poems forthcoming in *Knockout Magazine* and *Paradise Found* (Levellers Press, '13). Her work has appeared in the *Artful Dodge*, *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, *Drunken Boat*, *Equality Texas*, *Evergreen Review*, *Hampshire Life Magazine*, *The Hartford Courant*, *Ms. Magazine*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *SmokeLong Quarterly*, *Upstreet*, *Verse*, *Manthology: Poems on the Male Experience* (Univ. of Iowa Press, '06), and *Morning Song: Poems for New Parents* (St. Martin's Press, '11).



JANE SATTERFIELD'S third collection, *Her Familiars*, was published by Elixir Press in 2013. She is also the author of *Assignation* at Vanishing Point (2003 Elixir Press Poetry Prize); *Shepherdess with an Automatic* (WWPH/2000 Towson University Prize for Literature), and *Daughters of Empire: A Memoir of a Year in Britain and Beyond* (Demeter Press, 2009). She has received a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in Literature and, in 2013, the 49th Parallel Prize from the Bellingham Review.

PURVI SHAH thanks her Southern roots for an abiding love of pecan pie and neighborly chatter. In her current life in NYC, she seeks to inspire change through her work as a non-profit consultant, anti-violence advocate, and writer. Winner of the inaugural SONY South Asian Excellence Award for Social Service for her work fighting violence against women, she recently directed *Together We Are New York*, an Asian American poetry project responding to the 10th anniversary of 9/11. Her debut book, *Terrain Tracks*, garnered the Many Voices Project prize and was nominated for the Asian American Writers' Workshop Members' Choice Award. Her current poetry project focuses on women's desires, social status, and being. You can find more of her work at her website, purvipoets.net.

CINDY SMALL, a New Orleans, Louisiana native, was born into a Jewish, Viennese family. Cindy graduated from Tulane University with an undergraduate degree in Journalism and Masters in Historic Preservation Studies. Since Hurricane Katrina, she has relocated to N. Alabama. "Love Your Bosom; It's a Holy Thing" was taken from her manuscript "Family Sequins." Cindy's specialty is humorous dark vignettes about her train wreck of a life. In addition to working at UAHuntsville, AL, she also writes a weekly Spotlight column for *The Decatur Daily* in Decatur, AL.

CARRIE SPELL has published fiction and non-fiction in over twenty magazines and journals including *McSweeney's*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Mississippi Review*, *New World Writing*, *Georgetown Review*, and others. She is a former Associate Editor of the *Mississippi Review* and she currently teaches at Auburn University.

D.A. SPRUZEN'S first chapbook, *Long in the Tooth*, was published by Finishing Line Press this past July.

AGNIESZKA STACHURA makes her home in North Carolina. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Broken Plate*, *Still Point Arts Quarterly*, *Prime Number*, *Minerva Rising*, *Damselfly Press*, *Prick of the Spindle*, *Fifth Wednesday Journal*, *Flash*, and *The Sun*, among other publications.

KMA SULLIVAN'S poetry has been published or is forthcoming in *Southern Humanities Review*, *Forklift*, *Ohio*, *The Nervous Breakdown*, *Gargoyle*, *diode*, *Anti-*, and elsewhere. Her recent essays have appeared in *The Rumpus*, *The Good Men Project*, and *Nailed*. She has been awarded residencies in creative nonfiction and poetry at Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, Vermont Studio Center, and Summer Literary Seminars and she is the editor of *Vinyl Poetry* and the publisher at *YesYes Books*.

LAURA SULLIVAN is a graphic designer in Tallahassee, Florida. Her poetry has appeared in *The Iowa Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Kalliope* and other journals, as well as in *Reclaiming Class: Women, Poverty and the Promise of Higher Education in America*. She has lived all her life in the South, but for a few months in Indiana. A native Kentuckian, she has spent the last 25 years in Florida and Alabama.

CHRISTINE SWINT holds an MFA in creative writing/poetry from Georgia State University. She received a MA in Spanish language and literature from Middlebury College and has worked as an instructor of both English and Spanish. She won the 2012 Agnes Scott poetry prize for her poem "Learning to Pray in Spanish." Her poems appear or are forthcoming in *Slant*, *a Journal of Poetry*, *Tampa Review*, *Birmingham Review*, and others. A complete list of her publications can be found on her blog, *Balanced on the Edge* (<http://christineswint.com>).

CHEYENNE TAYLOR was raised in Birmingham, Alabama. She is a recent graduate of the University of Alabama at Birmingham with a degree in English and Creative Writing. During and since her time as an undergraduate she has worked on the staff of *PMS poemmemoirstory* and *Steel Toe Review*.

WENDY VARDAMAN (wendyvardaman.com) is the author of *Obstructed View* (Fireweed Press), co-editor of *Echolocations*, *Poets Map Madison*, co-editor/webmaster of *Verse Wisconsin* (versewisconsin.org), and co-founder/co-editor of *Cowfeather Press* (cowfeatherpress.org). She is one of Madison, Wisconsin's two Poets Laureate (2012-2015). Twitter: @wendylvardaman. Tumblr blog: [live art\(s\) art live\(s\)](http://liveart(s)artlive(s)).

DONNA D. VITUCCI lives in an historic home in Northern Kentucky and loves walking along the Ohio and Licking Rivers. Her fiction and poems have appeared in dozens of literary magazines and journals in print and online, including *Meridian*, *Hawaii Review*, *Front Porch Journal*, *Sojourn*, *Oklahoma Review*, and most recently in *Watershed Review* and *GERM Magazine*. Her novel manuscript, *FEED MATERIALS*, was judged a finalist for the 2010 Bellwether Prize, and is under agent representation. She has four finished novels in a trunk. She has a courtyard where she lovingly tends tomato plants each summer just like her grandma did.



JANIE DEMPSEY WATTS is a Chattanooga native with strong Georgia roots. Watts enjoys writing fiction and non-fiction stories. Her novel "Moon Over Taylor's Ridge," nominated for a Southern Independent Bookseller Award and a finalist in the Augusta Literary Festival, is a book club favorite. Her short stories have been published in SWR and other anthologies. When not writing or tending to her horses, Janie enjoys speaking at libraries, universities and to other groups. Her current fiction project is a collection of short stories, "Mothers, Sons, Lovers and Other Strangers." She lives near Taylor's Ridge in Georgia and writes with her American bulldog, Bella, at her feet. Please visit her at: www.janiewatts.com.

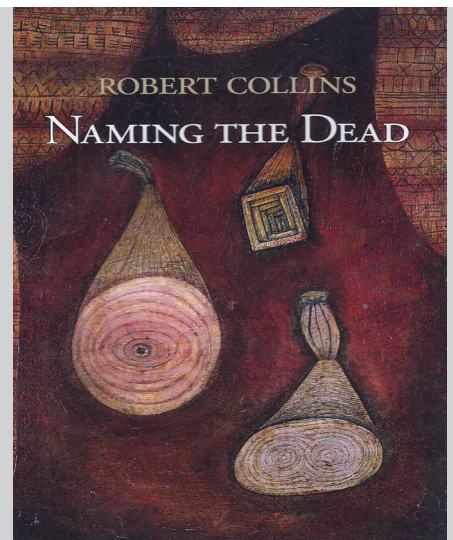
MARJORY WENTWORTH'S poems have been nominated for The Pushcart Prize five times. Her books of poetry include Noticing Eden, Despite Gravity, and The Endless Repetition of an Ordinary Miracle and New and Selected Poems. She is the co-writer with Juan Mendez of Taking a Stand, The Evolution of Human Rights, co-editor with Kwame Dawes of Seeking, Poetry and Prose inspired by the Art of Jonathan Green, and the author of the prizewinning children's story Shackles. Marjory teaches poetry in The Charleston County Schools Engaging Creative Minds Program and she is on the faculty of the Art Institute of Charleston. She is the co-founder and President of the Lowcountry Initiative for the Literary Arts. Her work is included in the South Carolina Poetry Archives at Furman University, and she is the Poet Laureate of South Carolina.

BARBARA WIEDEMANN, professor of English and Director of Creative Writing at Auburn University Montgomery, is the author of a critical study entitled Josephine Herbst's Short Fiction: A Window to Her Life and Times (Susquehanna University Press). Her poems have appeared in Southern Women's Review, Rambler, Blueline, Kerf, Feminist Studies, Paper Street, Riverwind, and other journals. She is the author of three chapbooks: Half-Life of Love (2008), Sometime in October (2010), and Death of a Pope and Other Poems (2013), all published by Finishing Line Press.

JACKLON MICHELLE WRIGHT has a B.A. in English from Birmingham-Southern College. She was born and raised in rural Alabama.

GAIL WHITE has edited 3 anthologies and written three poetry collections. She received the Howard Nemerov Sonnet Award for 2012 and 2013 and was the featured poet in the first issue of the new Light at www.lightrpoetymagazine.com. Her chapbook Sonnets in a Hostile World is available from Amazon. She lives in Breaux Bridge, Louisiana with her husband and three cats.

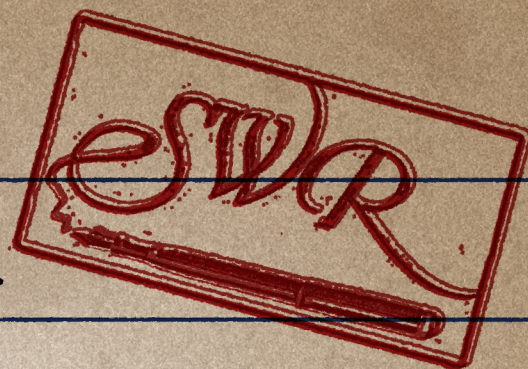
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