



Cut butter into flour



add
1 1/4 cup
buttermilk

SOUTHERN WOMEN'S REVIEW





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MARYANN CORBETT'S work has appeared in *River Styx*, *Atlanta Review*, *The Evansville Review*, *Literary Imagination*, *Christianity and Literature*, *The Dark Horse*, *Linebreak*, *Subtropics*, and many other journals in print and online. New work is forthcoming in *PN Review* and *32 Poems*. She's been a Best of the Net finalist, a winner of the Lyric Memorial Award and the Willis Barnstone Translation Prize, and a finalist for the Morton Marr Poetry Prize and the Able Muse Book Prize. Her first book, *Breath Control*, came out early last year, and her second will appear early in 2013. She lives in Saint Paul, Minnesota, and works for the Minnesota Legislature.

SHERYL CORNETT was born in Texas and grew up in Virginia and North Carolina--when she wasn't living abroad in Africa, England, or France. Her stories, poems, and essays appear or are forthcoming in *Image*, *North Carolina Literary Review*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *Raleigh News and Observer*, among other journals and magazines and in several anthologies including *Christmas Stories from the South's Best Writers* and in *The Global Jane Austen* (June 2013).

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LINDA L. DUNLAP writes Southern narrative fiction and poetry and has had short stories and poems published in many literary journals and small presses including Savannah Literary Journal, Crescent Review, Old Hickory Review, Black Hammock Review, RE:AL, Louisville Review and Southern Woman's Review. She has been awarded three artist's fellowship grants from the Fla. Dept. of Cultural Affairs. One was awarded in 1996 for her short story, "Melissa", another in 2000 for an excerpt from her novel, *Digging Queen Esther's Grave* and again in 2010 for her short story entitled, "Goldenrod," Published in Timber Creek Review in 2009, "Goldenrod" was also nominated for a 2010 Pushcart Prize. Most recently her work has been published in Timber Creek Review, and New Southerner Magazine, an online publication.

LATORIAL FAISON is a southern American poet and writer. Though she is a native and resident of Virginia, she currently resides in South Korea with her husband, an Army officer. She has three sons. She has authored 5 books of poems and has been published in various literary journals and magazines. As a college English Instructor, for the last 14 years, she has taught at colleges and universities in North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, Illinois, Virginia, and now South Korea. She recently joined the faculty of Sejong University as an Assistant English Professor.

CYNTHIA GALLAHER Though she has lived in Chicago her whole life, her ancestors and family have hugged the Mississippi from Hannibal, Missouri down to Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She's served two residencies in the Culinary Suite at the Writers Colony at Dairy Hollow in Eureka Springs, Arkansas, where she wrote "Generations of Beans." This poem is forthcoming in her chapbook "Omnivore Odes: Poems About Food, Herbs and Spices" (Finishing Line Press, 2013).

TRINA GAYNON was born in Arizona into an Air Force family and traveled a great deal in her first twelve years. After her father retired in Tennessee, his original home, she attended high school in Waverly county. She is a graduate of the M.F.A. program in Creative Writing at University of San Francisco. Her poems have appeared in the anthologies *Bombshells* and *Knocking at the Door*, as well as numerous journals including *Natural Bridge*, *Reed*, and the final issue of *Runes*.

JOANNA GRANT'S work has appeared in *Guernica*, *The Southern Women's Review*, *Verse Monthly*, *The Southern Humanities Review*, and elsewhere. She is a Collegiate Associate Professor/Wandering Scholar with the University of Maryland, currently on assignment in Southwest Asia.

KAREN PAUL HOLMES moved to Atlanta in the early 1980s and has never missed Michigan winters. She hosts a poetry critique group in Atlanta and a Writers' Night Out in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Poems have appeared in journals such as *Poetry East*, *Atlanta Review*, *Caesura*, *Main Street Rag*, and *The Sow's Ear Poetry Review* as well as anthologies, including the *Southern Poetry Anthology: Vol. 5: Georgia* (Texas Review Press).

CLAIRE HERMANN has published poetry in *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, *Earth's Daughters*, *EarthSpeak*, *Caesura*, and *dirtcakes*, and she was a finalist for the 2012 North Carolina Poet Laureate's award. She lives with her spouse in the small town of Pittsboro, N.C., where she does nonprofit communications and writes on her back porch with eight cats.

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MARIA KOORS lives and writes in Birmingham, Alabama. She is finalizing her first collection of poems.

RONNA MAGY lives in sunny Los Angeles, a city whose mixture of diverse people and cultures led her to write about the South. She is a writer of poetry and short story. Her recent work appears or is forthcoming in *Trivia: Voices of Feminism*; *Lady Business: A Celebration Of Lesbian Poetry*; *Vicera*; *Where Thy Dark Eye Glances*; *Queering E.A. Poe*; *My Life is Poetry*; and *Sinister Wisdom*. She is the author of several English as a Second Language textbooks.

MELBA MAJOR grew up in small town Mississippi--climbing trees, building forts, and playing a game called "rodeo," which involved trying not to fall off the open tailgate of a pickup truck while her father rammed around the pasture. Melba holds an MFA in Creative Nonfiction from Antioch University Los Angeles. She currently lives in Birmingham, Alabama, where she is pursuing an MA in English with a concentration in Rhetoric and Composition. One of her lyric essays, "The Wild Things," was recently featured in *The Citron Review*. When not reading and writing, Melba enjoys gallivanting with her phenomenal canine companion Nikita.

TARA MANTEL Tara's fiction has appeared in several top literary journals, including *TriQuarterly*, *The Gettysburg Review*, and *Confrontation*. She has published over a dozen fiction and nonfiction pieces and has won several writing awards, including a nomination for the Pushcart Prize. She's currently working on her second novel.

MARIANA MCDONALD'S poetry has appeared in numerous publications, including *Texas Review Press' The Southern Poetry Anthology: Georgia, Sugar Mule, From a Bend in the River: 100 New Orleans Poets*, and *El Boletín Nacional*. A bicultural poet writing in English and in Spanish, mariana mcdonald moved in 2001 from New Orleans to Atlanta, where she works as a scientist addressing health disparities. She became a Fellow of Georgia's Hambidge Arts Center in 2012.

DEVON MILLER-DUGGAN has published poems in *Rattle*, *Shenandoah*, *Margie*, *Christianity and Literature*, *The Indiana Review*, *Harpur Palate*, and *The Hollins Critic*. She's won an Academy of American Poets Prize, a fellowship and a grant from the Delaware Division of the Arts, an editor's prize in *Margie*, and an Honorable Mention in *Rattle*. She teaches for the Department of English at the University of Delaware. Her first book, "Pinning the Bird to the Wall," appeared from *Tres Chicas Books* in November 2008. A new chapbook of poems about angels, "Neither Prayer, Nor Bird," will be published in 2013 by *Finishing Line Press*.

MAUREEN O'BRIEN In October 2012, her short story manuscript *The Dwindlers* was a finalist in the BOA Editions Short Story Contest. In October, 2011, she was awarded first place in the New Millenium Writing Award for Poetry. Her poetry chapbook "The Other Cradling" was published in May 2011, by *Finishing Line Press*. It received an Honorable Mention in the New England's Poetry Club 2011 Jean Pedrick Chapbook Award. b-mother, her first novel, was published by *Harcourt Trade* in Feb. 2007, and has also been translated into German and Italian. It was selected by the New York Public Library as a Best Teen Read for 2007, and the movie rights sold to *Lifetime Original Movies*. She received a grant from *Barbara Deming Memorial Fund/ Money for Women* to complete b-mother.

MEGAN ROBERTS grew up in Eastern North Carolina, so it's no surprise her poems and stories are rooted in the particular language and landscapes of her home state. "Ode to Oysters" is inspired by many November nights shucking oysters with her uncles in Greenville, NC. Her fiction has appeared in *971Menu*, *The News & Observer*, *Our Stories*, *The Smokelong Quarterly*, and *The Raleigh Quarterly*. In April 2010, she was awarded N.C. State's Academy of American Poets Prize. *Matters of Record*, a chapbook, was published by *Finishing Line Press* in August 2012. She teaches English at *Methodist University*. Visit www.mattersofrecord.me to find out more about her poetry.

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LAURA SECORD has a degree in English Literature from UC Berkeley, as well as a Master's Degree in Nursing from UAB. She studied writing with Patricia Smith, Pierre Delattre, the Squaw Valley Writer's Workshop and Naropa Summer Writing Program. Her poetry has been published in many print publications including PMS- PoemMemoirStory. She has performed her verse play, Sanapia's Courage Medicine, at numerous venues including Goddard College and The Tennessee Women's Theater Festival.

MARSHA A. TEMLOCK teaches English at Norwalk Community College. She is the author of *Your Child's Divorce: What to Expect ... What You Can Do* (Impact Publishers, Inc.) and writes a blog for the Huffington Post about family relationships, mainly directed at women. Her poetry and fiction were recently published in online publications including The Write Room, Bareback, Airline Reading and The Rusty Nail. She has lived in Miami Beach and Boca Raton, reluctantly trading sun for New England snow. Her story, "Gal Friday," is about a middle aged woman's redefinition through social networking.

ALARIE TENNILLE is active at The Writers Place in Kansas City, Missouri, where she served on the Board of Directors for many years. Her chapbook, *Spiraling into Control*, is available on Amazon.com. Alarie's poems have appeared in numerous journals including Margie, Poetry East, English Journal, I-70 Review, Wild Goose Poetry Review, and Untitled Country Review. atenni@mac.com

CETORIA TOMBERLIN is a poet and fiction writer who lives in Northwest Georgia. She received her Bachelor's degree in Creative Writing from Berry College in May 2010. Her work has previously appeared in *The Battered Suitcase*, *Spires*, and is forthcoming in *Fairy Tale Review*. She is currently at work on her first novel.

LINDA UMANS has made frequent trips to the South for various reasons; nature travel, visits to friends, and has always found inspiration in the literature, culture and the eccentric beauty of the people and places. She enjoyed a long teaching career in the New York City public schools and is a native of Manhattan where she lives, studies, writes. Recent publications include poems in *qarrtsiluni*, *YB*, *Terrain.org*, *The Broome Street Review*, *Status Hat*, *Switched-on Gutenberg* and pieces in *Mr. Beller's Neighborhood* and *Literary Bohemian*.

JENIFER K. WARD was born and raised in central Arkansas, and was educated at Hendrix College and Vanderbilt University. She is the Interim Provost at Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle, WA, and serves as Editor of *OFF PAPER*, the online journal of the The Project Room, a multidisciplinary art space in Seattle. She continues to have deep roots at her family's farm in Bee Branch, AR, where she visits several times a year.

JANIE DEMPSEY WATTS was born in Chattanooga and grew up riding horses at her family's north Georgia farm. Her curiosity about most everything led to a writing career. Her first novel, "Moon Over Taylor's Ridge," is set in a fictional community alongside Taylor's Ridge. Her short stories have twice been published in *SWR*, and in anthologies and magazines. She now lives near the family farm and Taylor's Ridge. When not playing with her horses, she can be found at her desk writing with her American bulldog, Bella, supervising. Please visit her at: www.janiewatts.com.

ALLYSON WHIPPLE lives in Austin, Texas. Primarily a poet of place, the various landscapes and climates of the state contribute extensively to her poetry. Her chapbook, *We're Smaller Than We Think We Are*, is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press in April 2013. She is the primary contributor to literaryaustin.com, and blogs about her writing life at <http://allysonmwhipple.wordpress.com>. When not at her day job or working on poetry, Allyson is working toward her black belt in kung fu.

AMY WRIGHT is the Nonfiction Editor of Zone 3 Press and Zone 3 journal (<http://www.apsu.edu/zone3>), as well as the author of three chapbooks—*Farm*, *There Are No New Ways To Kill A Man*, and *The Garden Will Give You A Fat Lip*. Wright was awarded the emerging writer's creative non-fiction award during the 2012 Berry College Southern Women Writer's Conference.

SALLY BANKS ZAKARIYA is a native Virginian who lives in Arlington, Virginia. Her first book, "Arithmetic and other verses," was published in 2011 by Richer Resources Publications.



Teaching the Concept of Paradox

by Kathy Ackerman

"Irony" they get, and are content with contradiction,
their daily thinking quota filled
but I push on to paradox,
try to make them see
the other side of opposite.

My favorite I call the Southern Paradox:
once the lynching capital of the western world,
yet as well the Bible Belt.
They readily see the contradiction.

Then I ask them to name all they know
of belts: how they look, what they do, and all
their synonyms. I ask why not
the Bible Scarf, or Bible Shawl,
why not, praise god, the Bible Comforter?

My teacher's optimism dies in the half full cup
as I give up
my own illustration,
bow to the standard
textbook's standard example.

I leave my message to linger in air
confused by originality
hoping one or two of them will take it in.

I move on, for parting *is*
such sweet sorrow.



Cleaning Your Closet

by Laura Secord

Behind the white linen suits
pressed and stainless
crisp and clean;

Behind the white linen shirts,
the perfectly pressed shirts,
all hung one inch apart;

Behind the bright and stainless whites-
the pants and suits, jackets
and skirts of early summer;

Behind your closet's crisp perfection
hangs brown and aged,
the dark rubber douche bag,
that you have engraved with the most
private smudgings of female pain.



No Rescue But In Stories

for Joe

by Amy Wright

The second ferry
in the last year has capsized
in Zanzibar. Survivors stood
atop its upturned belly waiting
to be rescued I heard
on NPR this morning &
thought of your day delivering
pizzas, trying to make frayed
financial ends reach each other.

I am glad I called,
though your circumstances
have not improved. We are worth
more than our choices regarding
happenstances.

You are wrong,
I tell you, to read rejection
into the story of us. Do you not remember
that night on the balcony
in the rain? No one said no
to anybody.

People are geologic
plates that wriggle and fit
into fault lines only to find the pattern
shifts—a lake scene into a football
stadium, a field of poppies
beside a wide road
down which a pickup truck barrels.
We ran alongside each other
for miles, adjacent in contrast
& then, a duck pond, a rock
ledge, a gradual slope
from which water falls
& falls valuable.



Sleepover at the Budget Inn

by Claire Hermann

We each did this when we were sixteen:
the sashaying fashion shows,
the grinding music, the giggling,
the flashlight under the sheets.

Tonight we are grown women,
though the only signs of it
are the half-drunk bottles of beer
and our wide hips bumping each other under the blankets.

The questions are still the same:
Does he love me, and should I love him? Is this the right dress?
What about sex? And have you heard
that Pablo Neruda poem, the one with the salt rose?

In the morning, we will exchange business cards,
email each other respectfully about networking opportunities
and grant applications, the exhausting struggle to change the world
in these women's bodies, in these skins.

But for now, stop hogging the sheets. Tell me something.
Turn the light back on and listen to this.



Subtle Miracles

by Maria Koors

I might awe you with the ordinary nature of facts:
how plankton fuel our planet
and its 10,000 species of orchids,
or the human mouth's 10,000 taste buds,
or how the brain deciphers 10,000 scents.
Just thinking about ways we think
recalculates the road maps of our neurons.

So what? You might say.

Consider the cosmic odds of your parents meeting
for what could be more extraordinary
than the ratio of your conception
and your evolution from embryo to baby to child to teen
to the adult you are now who's reading this poem,
voicing these words with your mind at this moment;
what are the chances of that?



Darlin'

by Cectoria Tomberlin

He knew I hated it.
I told him so plenty more than twice.
But still, he said it slowly, like he was
John Wayne.

I wanted to bury that phrase under a concrete foundation.
Instead, I gave it these terrible connotations no one really understood.
When boys call me that now, I cringe,
maybe even cry. It's stupid, I know,
but what hate isn't?

I keep writing it down
in diaries, journals, crossword puzzles,
on tablecloths and sundresses trying to get the meaning out,
but it always ends the same;
they gather themselves around me
and burn
slowly.



Then

by Devon Miller-Duggan

His tongue, when she kissed him, was sand.

The visitor walking beside her was water—water for skin,
water for breath, water for bones, water heart,
water hands, water eyes.

All the way home across the flat land,
the sky ahead made itself into mountains—
purpled, snow-sloped mountains
with the sun light bloodying the ridgelines.

His tongue, when she kissed him, was pebbles.

She rolled orange peels between her hands,
releasing the oils into the cuts on her hands.
The scent rose.

She found the place where the lightning bled red
from the clouds, where the ground
called the lightning into its skin.

His tongue, when she kissed him, was leaves.

The ground along the road sang to itself.
The visitor's hand wound itself into her hair.
Her head fell back against it.
Water poured into her eyes.

The scent from her hands wound them together,
roping their skins together.

His tongue, when she kissed him, was bitter seeds.

The desert drew its breath. The stones grew thorns.
Flower. Trail. Bone. Rise.



Proposal

by Catherine Pritchard Childress

He pulled her against him,
his fingertips resting in pale striations
stretched across her hips,
marks of the life she leaves behind
when she closes her eyes
in dream,

Or is it prayer
that finds her yielded to the urge
of this man kneeling at her feet,
offering what he can only give
cloistered in these trees,
dirt piercing his skin through denim,
tears betraying her behind tinted glass
as she looks down on his silent appeal,

There was no ring boxed in velvet,
his well-rehearsed speech used on another,
no promise

(never a promise)

not even three little words.

There was no question.

Just a man on his knees
his face buried in her softening stomach,
his lips begging her to respond.



Refinery

by Allyson Whipple

It was the pitch-black of
nine o'clock November
and the traffic had fizzled out
when I first saw
the towers lit up in gold
some blinking red or
blue or green
polluting the stars
and I thought we'd stumbled across
the power plants of Oz
until you said

*They don't have refineries
where you're from, do they?*

Three autumns later
they still light up I-10
between Beaumont
and Houston
but all I can think is
*If we were divorced,
I'd be home by now*
and remember how little
time has passed
since traffic jams
meant time to talk
and the journey could have
all the roadblocks it wanted
just as long as we were together



Abandoned

by Tabitha Carlson Bozeman

Floors littered with
Princess-pink tank tops,
Bible coloring book scenes,
A lonely bedazzled flip flop,
Stuffed animals and Playboys and jellybeans.

On the closet floor,
Faded black panties, unpaid bills,
A marriage license, framed,
Covered by mismatched bottles and pills.
Family photos on the bedroom wall, cracked and stained.

A baby doll face down
On a spelling list;
Stench of used diapers and waste and rot,
Wooden bunk beds collapsed
In the other room beside cat litter ammonia hot.

In a Dora notebook,
A letter from Mom
Explaining why she had to leave.
Next page, two drawings in crayon:
"Mommy Crying", "Daddy Wearing a Daisy".



Writer's Block

by Andrea Badgley

I have officially run out of story ideas. A friend of mine has encouraged me to submit work to the Southern Women's Review, and as the deadline approaches, I find myself creatively crippled.

I am a Southern woman, born in the South, raised in the South, and after a few years in the not-South, we have settled down in my motherland and will raise our children in the South. Anything I write, then, is fair game for this journal: "Submissions should be from women who were born in or grew up in the U.S. South; currently live in the U.S. South; or write about the U.S. South."

But that's not enough for me, to be a born and bred Southerner and to currently live in the U.S. South. I feel like I should write *about* the South, about how I never felt like I fit in as a Southerner growing up (I didn't like sweet tea, for one), but when I moved away and folks sincerely thought the South was like *Deliverance*, that if they stopped their cars in the southeast they'd risk violent rape by toothless bumpkins, I defended my home against their ignorance and developed a fierce pride for my region. Or I could write about how I didn't understand the South for so many years of my young life - Southern pride, the clinging to Dixie flags, the continued obsession with the "War between the states" - and how *Gone with the Wind* (the book, not the movie) explained my heritage and helped me understand Southern culture better than any history class ever could. Or maybe I should write about my experiences as a Southern woman who explored other regions, who has lived in other parts of the country and loved them, but how it still feels like a homecoming to move back to Virginia, even though I grew up in Georgia.

Or maybe, I could write about my childhood in the South. About my Granddaddy and Nannie's farm in Eatonton, Georgia. Where we dug worms from the wet soil of the creek bank, in the shade, by the old mill on their farm, then threaded them, still squirming, on our hooks to catch yellow-bellies in Crooked Creek. Where a trip to the hardware store with Granddaddy, in his old silver Ford pick-up truck with a shiny black steering wheel knob and the shifter on the steering column, was the highlight of our visit when we'd stay a whole week. Where we dug potatoes, and planted carrots in neat rows, and shucked corn and snapped peas under the walnut tree by the tractor shed. Where in the morning I'd say, "Wait Granddaddy! I'm coming with you," while I hurried to put on my Nannie's boots to walk through the dewy grass, past the scuppernong vine, and the gourd birdhouses, and the peach orchard, to the compost pile behind the barn. Where Nannie had a plaque on the wall that said "The only way to kill time is to get busy and work it to death." Nannie, who'd grin and say "Scat!" when we'd sneeze, or "Skin the cat," when my brother would peel off his sweaty shirt from working in the stagnant middle-Georgia heat. Nannie who worked crossword puzzles, and made cornbread stuffing, and raised three kids while Granddaddy flew bombers in the wars.

Or my mind goes back to Grandma and Grandpa's house on 6th Street, East Beach, St. Simons Island, Georgia. Grandma with her pretty pastel pillow mints in a crystal dish on the sideboard, with the \$2 she left under our pillows when we'd visit, with bottles of Roloids on every end table, between all the couch cushions, tucked in the cushions of each chartreuse chair, where nowadays someone's cell phone would fall, and get lost, and be found when the chair suddenly vibrates under someone's bottom, surprising them so that their eyebrows shoot up and their mouth forms an "O." Grandma, who introduced me to *A Clockwork Orange*, her favorite vinyl record, with that strange and wonderful white cover, with a man in a bowler hat and one set of false eyelashes who smiled an enigmatic smile as he emerged, dagger in hand, from a black triangle. Grandma who taught me how to brush my teeth with my finger when I forgot my toothbrush, who had a rosebush by her front door, and who'd give me scissors and a vase when I asked if I could cut pink roses for her. Grandma, who said "You all" instead of "y'all" in her sophisticated, old money, soft Southern drawl.

And Grandpa in his seersucker suit, quiet, always smiling, who'd disappear to his room upstairs, full of light and warm salty air, with a clear view of the dunes, and the wide tan beach, and the distant sound of waves swishing over sand. Grandpa who had a podium up there, with the biggest dictionary you ever saw, and an old black and white TV with a rabbit ear antenna and a knob



that you turned with a satisfying click to change the channel. And Grandpa'd come back down with a handheld wooden maze where you'd have to deliver the tiny silver bead from one end to a hole in the other. Or with a wooden puzzle cube that we'd pull apart and spend hours trying to put back together. Grandpa, a career diplomat, who earned his law degree after his three sons had grown up and moved away, who was scorned as a young man by Grandma's parents (for being poor) until he started working for the State Department, when his now proud mother-in-law began submitting his and Grandma's travels to the Atlanta Journal's Society pages. Grandpa, who loved Heavenly Hash ice cream, who smiled and waved at us, the grandkids coloring quietly on the green shag carpet, during the evening hours when Grandma would settle in with her gin and milk to talk politics with her sons and their wives.

But those are just descriptors, right? Childhood memories of an aging Southern woman who has returned to the South. There's no plot. There's no story there. So here I sit, wondering what I will write.



Lake Effect

by Tara Mantel

1. *Love, Incubating*

It scratches at Danni in the evenings and itches her legs under the sheets at night. It pulls at the neckline of her pajama top. She dreams about it—one morning she wakes up moaning, the sweat of ecstasy slipping at her hairline and between her breasts. She sits up to cool off, thinks, *Whoever loves me will not be sorry*.

These dreams go on and on and on. Every night there is a man at the door, outside the window, under the carpet. She rolls up the carpet so he won't suffocate.

Her love does not have the glandular conviction of adolescence nor is it threatened by midlife realism. Rather, it is arched, elliptical, moonlike, slightly cracked; it is luminous, orange, crepuscular, and smells of roots and chicory, and it is this way because it is ready to be given.

There is a new man in her life now, a man who is here because some other woman is gone. He is a man who emerged out of loss and, as such, cannot be denied.

2. *Sarah, Dead*

The lake Danni lives on holds many loves. It holds the love of tide and current and of all that flows into it. It holds love from the looks of those who have seen it and wish to be close to it. It holds the love of people with destructive secrets, of people who want to be swallowed.

Danni's friend Sarah used to teach at the university affiliated with Danni's and also in an anthropology department, which meant that the two of them went to the same out-of-town conferences and sometimes met in the same function halls on campus. But the lake swallowed her four months ago, in April. Sarah's spirit was egg-shaped, and the night it collapsed, she had been visiting her brother Ian, a furniture restorer from St. Paul, who lived almost directly across the lake from Danni. After they ate dinner, Sarah went outside. She crushed cinnamon ferns and slick moss as she made her way down the wooded slope to the pier. She swam out into the lake, swam some more, and then stopped swimming. She sank to the silty bottom and took with her all of her love, her loves, and her potential loves.

Years ago, Danni's own brother, Ryan, left this earth by his own skilled hands. He was young; perhaps because of this—and because of her particular spiritual beliefs—she couldn't understand the idea of a lost life. Rather, she liked to think of it as merely clipped off, like a trimmed plant stem, slowed down temporarily but storing potential in the form of shoot and bud.

3. *The Man*

Danni pours herself some coffee and sits at a miraculous table, which she discovered at a clothing store that was going out of business. It is constructed of wooden slabs and thick legs. The table top has one drawer on each side, and is loaded with end-of-semester test booklets, a laptop, and stacks of articles she intends use for her next paper, which she hopes to present in fall at a conference.

Danni notices that one of the drawers is open. She checks to see if there's anything in it, anything she might have needed or looked for recently. But the drawer is empty. This is not the only trick her memory has played on her. Her memory, or her eyes. All are tricks, though, and after each one she is able to convince herself that what she remembers, and what she sees, are all subject to the revisionist impulse. Which means she is able to sleep at night and view these mini-narratives as not only not harmless but essential for imaginative, critical thought.

She closes the drawer, then goes to the kitchen for a grapefruit. The kitchen window has just been replaced, and she looks



out of it while she loosens the pink sections. She imagines Sarah pale and naked, descending down to the lake, stepping onto the pier, then lowering herself into the frigid spring water. Was the moonlight shining or were what must have been the black sky and the black water indistinguishable? Earlier that week the two of them had flown back together from a conference in Buffalo, where Danni suggested they coauthor an article for an anthology. Danni remembers that Sarah hadn't been paying attention, had offered only a nonsequitur: *I should have done more with my mind.*

Since April, Danni has been in touch with Sarah's brother, Ian. Initially, she wrote to him out of a sisterly concern for his well-being, but now they communicate regularly. She writes him an email message one evening. *If you're going to talk about love, you have to talk about death.* A glass of cabernet sits at her elbow. They had been exchanging messages about how some people drift far away and can't come back. He replies: *And birth.*

Ian refurbishes antiques, particularly large pieces like bureaus and dining tables. He has written to her of his latest, a Marot-style armchair. She writes to him of his efforts to deconstruct, which she jokingly calls a postmodern endeavor. He writes, *Years ago, I would have been merely a craftsman peddling stuff that had immediate value. Now I'm a magician.*

Danni thinks the night air must have swallowed Sarah first, and it must have smelled of beeswax and varnish. Ian's workroom bleeds out in this way. On the night of Sarah's drowning, he had needed to get a final coat of varnish on a Welsh dresser before going to bed. He left the workroom momentarily to get away from the fumes. He went in the house. And that's when he saw Sarah's clothes on the living room floor. She would sometimes disrobe this way when they were growing up—not in front of anyone, but when she was alone and about to go into the shower.

The wine glasses from dinner were half full, the plates still on the table, the leftovers cold and crusted over. He said that only later did he understand the significance of the years of lost smiles he saw emerge on Sarah's face all through dinner and, in fact, from the very first day of her visit. *The smiles, he wrote, of a woman about to destroy herself. Should I have understood this farewell? The things we don't think of can kill us.*

4. *Sarah, Alive*

Danni sits in the middle of the dead woman's kitchen. The house is the very last one on a dead end road, and small by contemporary standards. The kitchen needs updating, but the blue-swirl splash tile and gray-blue countertops are both calming and humble. She had just made a run for Italian sub sandwiches and lays them out on the table. She calls up to Ian, who had finished sorting out the spare room and had moved on to Sarah's bedroom.

Danni feels not like an intruder but an excavator. What to make, for instance, of nearly twenty sets of turquoise jewelry, none of which Danni had seen Sarah wear? Ian doesn't think the jewelry is worth anything—the style of the settings and the luster of the stones are of good quality but not original or obscure. And what of the Hungarian ceramic figurines? Possibly Sarah was saving the items for a potential daughter. But Ian said, “No, she never mentioned having kids,” to which Danni replied, “That means nothing.”

A month earlier, the oldest sister came to start the cleanup and found in the medicine cabinet a sister that neither she nor Ian ever knew. Internet searches revealed that the prescriptions were for anti-depressants and that the dosages were high. Ian was the one who came upon the closet filled with shoes, some with the stickers still on the bottoms, some still in their boxes and stuffed with tissue paper and dessicant packets. In all, seventy-six pairs of shoes.

Danni knows that there is a certain kind of person who collects and hordes, and that a person like this never feels safe. Danni looks at her own unmanicured toes and wide instep that make only flip-flops truly comfortable to her, and tries to remember Sarah unpacking in the hotel room. She had noted nothing unusual; Sarah roamed hotels the way she seemed to roam the earth: freely, even a bit carelessly. And still, she had done plenty with her mind, despite—or perhaps because of—her regret.

Ian comes downstairs and sits. He's wearing work pants caked with polish and wood dust and paint. He goes to the sink to wash his hands, then takes a bite of his sandwich. He says, “The lawyer says the final amount will still be over a million and a



half.”

The biggest surprise was finding out that Sarah was one of those closet stock-market traders who knew how to sell short and play the odds. Ian said that when she was just four years old, she made a wallet out of the old-fashioned cloth wallpaper they had in the house they grew up in.

Ian sits down. “So why academia? Why anthropology?” he asks.

These discoveries have hurt him. He and Sarah were the closest of the siblings, and he always felt he understood her more than even their parents. Her secrets, to him, were small betrayals that, together, created a path leading to her equally secret death wish.

Danni watches his long fingers wrap around the sandwich and squeeze it as he tears off another mouthful. “You’re a big brother,” she says, “you will always have questions.”

After the conference in Buffalo and before Sarah’s last meal at Ian’s was a discussion Danni and Sarah had about the things the body knows and when it knows them. They both believed that memories were stored not in the mind but in the cells of the body. They had always wanted to get to the bottom of the discussion, which was essentially about the hidden energy that courses through the body, energy that waits years, even lifetimes, for release. How the energy keeps telling us who we are, and how it lies to us. Danni’s lost brother knew he would always be the way he was: a slave to his illness, tyrannized by biological compounds that mental health experts still didn’t understand. If foresight lives anywhere in the body, it must be in bone marrow; it cannot, say, be transferred out of the body in a cancer operation, and even the ancient femurs of even more ancient peoples carry the clues to what makes the bone grow, and therefore of geography, and therefore of instinct.

Danni wanted to ask Sarah if she ever noticed that their discussions often strayed toward the idea of lost potential, but bringing this up would keep them going on even longer, forgetting about dinner or finishing the laundry. It was early April, a week before the conference, and possibly nothing Danni said during that conversation was taken seriously enough by a woman about to be dead.

The search crew found Sarah’s body in ten hours. That, too, was instinctual despite all the equipment: a diver said he felt deep into the tangled weeds along a certain section of the lake for a second time, then a third, because he heard the voice of his daughter just as his flipper became caught in them.

5. *Dead Brother*

When Danni envisions a population, she thinks of countless stalks growing up from the fertile bed of a bog. There are many bogs, each containing millions of stalks. Each stalk releases pollen. Some stalks, like the one representing her brother, Ryan, get cut off or are blunted somehow. The release of pollen stops. An aerial view would reveal the tiny gaps in the stalk-field, and you would see the system lagging. This is life and death construed as a closed system. But if the cut stalks continue to produce pollen or whatever substance it ultimately releases, this substance must go somewhere—perhaps back into the root system lodged into the bog’s ever-shifting bed. This is life and death construed as an open system.

Danni had been home from college during Ryan’s last bolt away from life and was the one to see him flatline. Danni saw him, at that moment, as a free soul. She called for a nurse, who called a doctor, but even several hits with the defibrillator did not alter Ryan’s path.

Ryan’s funeral had an open casket, which was their mother’s wish. She believed in a final view. Everyone made remarks about how peaceful he looked, how peaceful he must be, now, finally.

Danni barely looked at her dead brother. She didn’t want to remember him looking so prepared. She looked at the plush satin of the coffin. She thought of him alive with his illness, his lost mind, of his body moving compulsively, dangerously forward. She had seen this funeral before, many times, in her mind, but the real funeral parlor was filled with tulips, not lilies. In this funeral, there were rows of chairs in which to exchange pleasantries and speak of short lives and better worlds.

Danni said the eulogy. She said Ryan’s death was his own. She used the word suicide and included some statistics. She talked about the institution Ryan was in, how it smelled, what Ryan saw the last years of his life. She spoke of this place as a terrain



and praised Ryan for the ways he managed in it. She spoke of the nail-mural he pounded into his bedroom wall and of another nail pruned from an institutional wall filled with decades of mold and rust; she spoke of this nail and how it pierced him, how the sepsis was stronger than the original wound, how the slow poison finally found his heart.

She explained Ryan's violence as a manifestation of pain, as a sign of misguided imagination. She spoke of historical delinquents and literary delinquents and how the Oxford English Dictionary was compiled, in part, by a madman. Her point had been a larger one about all people who fall through the cracks, about the failure of signs and systems.

Danni explained how Ryan's death inspired her: not to do more with her life, not that life was short, but that to imagine one's own death releases all of one's potential.

She neglected to mention love in any way, but didn't realize it until many years later, after moving to a lake with a woman's spirit living on the bottom of it.

6. *Ghosts*

Danni decides that, for lack of a better explanation, her house has a ghost. The ghost has moved on from opening drawers to walking up and down the staircase. It's the third step from the top that creaks, and Danni hears this typically in the afternoon, although once she was awakened by it in the middle of the night.

She wonders if the ghost is Ryan's spirit, which brings up questions about the paranormal. One camp believes that spirits don't move around from place to place, that instead they are former inhabitants or have some connection to the area. Danni writes to Ian about this. *There is a ghost in my house. What should I do?* This is at 9:50 in the evening, while she drinks a gin and tonic. At midnight, she checks her messages. Ian has written, *Put out some cookies?* Danni writes, *Are ghosts always previous inhabitants?* Ian writes, *I watched too many crappy movies to answer this question.* Danni writes, *Do you think it's Sarah?* Ian doesn't reply. She calls him, but he doesn't pick up. She writes again: *I'm sorry if I upset you.*

The next day, Ian asks her to dinner. She changes into a silky dress and puts on extra makeup. Before leaving, she tears a piece of paper from a tablet and writes, *Tell me why you are here* and leaves it on the table. She also leaves a cup of Earl Grey tea. At the restaurant, they take a seat by the window. There's a large party in the middle of the dining area, and by the time Sarah and Ian order their meals, the conversation has grown louder. Everyone seems to be reaching over everyone; silver platters dot the table; one man has a chicken drumstick in his hand and shakes it at someone across the table.

Ian says, "It's like 'The Last Supper.'"

"Except for the women," Danni says.

"And the laughter," Ian says.

They sip their pinot grigio.

"I don't know," Danni says. "They might have laughed."

"Yes, maybe out of fear."

In the middle of their meal, Ian says, "Speaking of last suppers, do you think she thought of dinner at my house that night as notable, somehow? What would be the point of bothering to eat?"

"Maybe she didn't plan it out," Danni says.

Ian says that after dinner he had planned to ask Sarah something about her ring, the ring of dynastic origins. It was a black pearl surrounded by diamonds, all set in silver. It wasn't a family heirloom, but its history featured famous ships and moguls. It nearly went down with its owner—the wife of a mogul's friend—into the depths of the Atlantic but instead that wife sold the ring for unknown reasons. The insurance paper trail revealed that it had been an engagement ring for a woman in Edina, Minnesota, then an engagement ring for that woman's daughter-in-law. Then Ian's friend, a dealer in antique jewelry, acquired it. Sarah received it on her next birthday. The ring held, in all, ninety-seven years' worth of love, and on Sarah's finger, the reasoning went, the potential for its release. Ian had wanted to ask her whether she found out where the pearl came from.

The divers pulled Sarah's body from the muck a half a day later. Ian said that the forensics person had to cut the flesh



away on her finger to get the ring off.

Lost and secretive Sarah, mountains of shoes, a body that lied to her. In her wake, a man, another dinner, potential love. Danni thinks Sarah would approve but then isn't so sure. She watches the last-supper table with its half-drunk wine and platters of devoured meat. In a few moments, she feels sick, and begins to think maybe she ate something bad. She and Ian walk to the car, his long fingers now wrapped around her waist, and by the time they get there, she is feeling better. She gives Ian a long kiss on the cheek. She cannot thank him properly. She cannot believe in him, sitting there, now starting the car and pulling it out onto the two-lane highway. In the space of the short drive, he becomes a mystery to her, so by the time she walks in her house she is not only surprised but motivated by her anger. She has never thought to call it anger—doing so seemed childish—but she sees it now, clearly, this anger toward her friend, a woman who told her nothing. Years of nothing.

And yet, this man in that woman's imperceptible midnight wake, a man who holds Danni, whose hands work her skin with warmth and pressure.

There is a great bog filled with stems and reeds and long blades of thick grass, and one more stem is cut off but no one can tell the difference.

The note lies on the floor. Danni goes to retrieve it, already concluding that its new position could be attributed not to a ghost but to the gust of air the door had surely created when she came in. She had forgotten to enter more carefully.

7. *Danni, Alive*

You, on your death bed: channel the future you want in order to live a fulfilled life. It's "you" as everyman, and "everyman" as every person. It's "channel" as in "summon," or "think about." She has written this to Ian, and calls up the message from the "sent mail" list. These were old words, words already scrambled into the ether and put back together again.

Her imaginary death bed comes to her as a pyre. She lies there on sticks, facing light-blue sky with pink and yellow in the clouds, dusk falling around her, the final riddle having hovered in the last seconds: Where is the evidence that a lifetime has passed by? Did her presence outweigh her absence?

She hasn't seen Ian in a week. He's been buried in work. He's finished the dresser, a jewelry box, and a Windsor rocking chair. His clients are upper middle class people or dedicated collectors. They sometimes call, or even stop in, to check on his progress. Ian explains all the steps involved, flashes his long fingers over a carved Chippendale panel or the fretted door of a secretaire cabinet, puts their minds at ease. His own home is filled with treasures—an Egyptian-style chiffonier, a hand-painted Tibetan chest with bamboo trim and inlaid mother-of-pearl, a red Japanese dressing table with an elaborate lotus motif applied with gold-flecked paint. His "museum"—an old breezeway with newly finished walls and pine flooring—contains pieces waiting for auction: a toboggan, still functional, and a mission-style cradle.

All evidence of death and survival, the passing of the torch. Danni once told Ian that he restores the evidence of life, not unlike the work of an anthropologist. But pride, for him, was in a job well done, in keeping his hands busy, in making people happy, and she has no argument with this, although she'd like for him to recognize the deeper symbolism.

She herself is not just interested in but smitten by these artifacts, the sweat in the wood, the tears in the hinges, ages of sunlight in long, unencumbered surfaces. She hears them talk; the toboggan says *rejoice in the moment*, the cradle says *I can promise you this*. All the secrets smeared away in oils and polishes and ultra-fine-grain sanders.

She has Ian come over to look at her table. The wood is oak; he determines that quickly. The construction, done with wooden pegs, is solid but unremarkable. It is fashioned after a stretcher table, which were early dining tables, but this one is made of oak, not pine. Its patina has no depth; the color variation and relatively light weight both signal reproduction. "Good thing I didn't waste my time going to *Antiques Roadshow*," she says. "But maybe this is why my ghost likes it."

Later they go to the Walker Art Center, first wandering the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden before moving on to the collections. They end at a temporary exhibit. There is water everywhere in these paintings, either overt or implied. Danni finds herself pausing in front of a work depicting Ophelia and her river—a stylized swamp with Ophelia standing at the brink, her dress made of real cloth sewn into the mount. The words "cover me green magic" fall around her in glitter and sliver thread painted over



with laquer.

Sweet Ophelia in the swamp, catching her death, recognizing her own weary soul reflected back to her.

That evening, on the pier, Danni fills the pockets of her cargo pants and denim jacket first with pebbles, then small rocks, then the larger rocks closer to the pier, rocks left white and exposed from erosion. All of them go in pockets, then in her left fist. Her intention is to understand the weight of these rocks in water, the exact feel of their pull downward. She lowers herself into the water, her right hand on the pier's edge. She lets go of the pier, stops kicking her legs, and lets her head submerge.

She keeps her eyes closed, feeling the subtle draw downward. Then, she seems to stop. She cannot dream of opening her mouth, of drawing in the cold suffocation. Is the breath held until the last second, or is the water just gulped in, the body snapping into panic, the rocks now crucial in the equation? Danni is out of time; she claws at the water, refuses to open her eyes. She paddles upward, the water becoming warmer, the light beyond her lids brighter.

She surfaces, long since letting go of the rocks in her left hand. Rising through the water to the top seemed to take minutes, but now that she has caught her breath, she realizes that it was more like seconds. She couldn't have been more than six or seven feet under water.

It was the air in her lungs, she thinks, that kept her buoyant, that allowed her to get back to the surface easily. She puts her hands on the pier and hoists her body upward, catching the edge of the pier with her leg. She lets the water drip from her. *This fucking lake*, she thinks.

As she walks up the slope to the house, along the path lined with ferns, she understands that it wasn't the air in her lungs that allowed her to surface so easily but simply a desire to live.

8. *Lake Effect*

It is probably the last day of summer. Danni and Ian wander down to the lake, taking the path with the stairs that lead from Ian's back door to the pier. His side of the lake is so different: taller trees, more shade, a variety of mushrooms. The water, too, seems lighter and greenish. A family of geese hugs the shoreline, the little ones dipping underwater, throwing their feathered butts upward.

They are here to swim. They drop their towels and ease into the water. Danni has an inflatable dinosaur, lavender with red splotches, and they push the thing back and forth as they swim out farther.

It's an unusually cool day, but the water holds the heat of the last two weeks of humidity. The approaching dark-gray band of sky forms at the tree line. Danni mounts the dinosaur and kicks over to Ian.

"This was a good idea," he says.

"Thanks," Danni says. "I don't have very many."

"I love when you're self-effacing."

Earlier they had talked about this swim: revisiting the site of the trauma, consciously re-creating positive memories, even embracing the bad memories.

He holds her face. "You're amazing."

She knows now that Sarah couldn't have explained herself, couldn't have confided when there was no urge.

"Plus," Ian says, "I'm sorta rich."

The lawyer finally had the details worked out. Ian and the oldest sister were to split the million dollars Sarah had accumulated.

"Feels like tainted dough," Ian says.

"What will you do with it?" Danni says.

"Invest it in my shop. Or save it for a rainy day." Ian points upward. "Which it is now."

The gray line over the trees had bled downward. The gray hangs over their heads, though the sky over the far shore is still white. The raindrops, which fall sporadically, are the largest Danni has ever seen. The lightning begins first as full-sky flashes, then as individual bolts chasing each other across the lake.

They climb onto the pier and run up the steps into the house. Immediately, it starts to pour. They race to close windows, but already the sills are soaked. Danni finds some towels in a closet and begins mopping up the water.

Ian has stopped asking questions, and doesn't now, as he leads her to the bedroom and undresses her, as he pulls off his trunks and lies on top of her.

"This was a very good idea," he says.

"I agree," says Danni.

His grief blankets her as the night swells, as her skin rises to his touch. There is no moon, only this man who



smells of algae and mud, who traces lines on her back with his tongue.

"If you love me, you won't be sorry," Danni says.

He opens her legs and sucks her. She sweats, her back hot against the sheets. She pushes into him as he intensifies.

Outside, the wind carries the storm elsewhere. The light becomes yellow. She looks outside as Ian enters her.

Near the middle of the lake, where the mist has moved out, is a flash of light. The wind stops. Danni tells herself she will remember the flash as lightning, the last bolt of a sensuous, volatile thunderstorm, but she knows lightning doesn't emanate from the surface of standing water.

She turns to Ian, arched above her, pushing deeply. The light must have been that of a falling star, all the way from the heavens to the lake, burning right up until the last second, when the water pulled it under.

The lake spares nothing, Danni thinks, and squeezes the corner of the sheet in her fist.

9. *Ryan, Alive*

Ryan flatlined on a rainy night, the water rushing down the hospital windows, about an hour after Danni arrived to visit. He was covered in a blanket. Mechanical beeps counted out the seconds, and the blue room settled on his face. Evening became night, Danni's vigil parenthetical to his passage.

A year earlier she had visited him in the musty institution located just a couple miles away. The building was a renovated monastery, moss-covered with nails buried in the walls, a relic from an assortment of earlier times but now a repository for the disturbed or deranged or possessed. Ryan sat in a chair, dazed, recently sedated. The nurses' station across the hallway both soothed and angered Danni.

She imagined the hug a sister might give to a brother in such a circumstance, but found her arms too heavy. If she ever said *Ryan, how have you been*, she didn't remember.

The men in the TV room one door down were howling. A nurse ran through the station door and across the hall. The security guards stiffened.

"Those are the real crazies," Ryan said. "They take their pants off and then they laugh, like children. If I take mine off, they forget that I steal from them."

Now, after months of steady decline, after a year of visits, the machine's beeps lured Danni closer. She didn't know how to wake him, so she reached to touch his shoulder, and when she did she found that it was mush and that her hand passed through it—no more flesh, no more blood, no more haunted shell deflecting the world.

There would be no revival.

There would be attorneys, a negligence case, a year of mediation. There would be a settlement. There would be belongings distributed, recycled, trashed. There would be ghosts. There would be a mother, thinned out and forever changed. There would be a sister plagued first with fear, then guilt, then regret. There would be years of dates, advanced education, boxed meals, therapy, new apartments, old furniture, presentations. There would be a down payment on a lake house, a man, creamy pearls, and sudden storms. There would be a harboring of love and a cursing of water, a love of water and a curse on love.

10. *Lake, Alive*

The lake holds ice patches that hold shades of white, patches with arched edgings showing gray shadow. Fine winter dust whorls in small cyclones over the numbed curves.

Below, there are lights ready to launch upward, to catch the eye of lucky onlookers.

Danni prepares for classes at the long, enchanted table, bereft now of ghostly manipulations. She has a black-pearl ring on her finger, a gift, fitted at a special store, especially for her. If the ring brings the water too close to her, she'll take it off. If water still gets too close, she'll drown the ring, finally and forever.

She dreams of curses lifted.

In winter, the lake is far away, all its life shuttered and glassed in.

In mid-December, she corrects the last exam of the semester. She pours herself the last of the wine, looks out the front window for Ian, who is picking her up for their bi-weekly dinner date. Tonight she will have salmon or cod, anything briney.

Ian will go home and finish a credenza for a customer who lives on a narrow, winding road in the nether regions of the county. He'll let it soak up the polish and then deliver it, newly finished and ready to gather the stories of those it serves, as soon as the path is clear.

Danni will come home and climb into her four-poster bed and feel hibernation in her bones.





Awakening

by Marsha A. Temlock

Lena was early. Only by ten minutes but that was enough to fill her with doubts. Underneath her black raincoat she wore a beige scoop-necked blouse and black slacks. In her purse she had a steak knife sheathed in a paper napkin. The knife was her friend Jackie's idea. Jackie was no ingénue to the online dating scene.

Drops of water leaked intermittently off the edge of the metal overhang of the all-night diner. "This is absolutely ridiculous." Lena dabbed a splat that landed on her purse with a damp tissue. A laughing, umbrella-less couple ducked into the restaurant.

Marty side-stepped a puddle. The parking lot was packed with cars. Mostly foreign makes. He stopped to admire a red Kia. Even the Koreans were cutting into the market. From the grainy headshot he figured her fair, blonde. She'd listed herself as late-fifties. When he narrowed his search to Lena Rogers, Ph.D. Signal Mountain, TN., date of birth would make her sixty-two. Well, he wouldn't hold that against her. He'd shaved off five years. Didn't look or feel like a man close to seventy. He saw a woman standing at the entrance of the diner. Glanced at his Rolex. No apologies necessary. Picked up his pace, swiping the thinning band of gray hair back over his bald spot.

"Lena?"

"Martin?"

"Marty. Marty Bower. Sorry if I kept you waiting."

"I just got here."

There was a sudden cloud burst. Lena flinched. "We better go inside." Marty took her arm and pushed open the door. He didn't look like a rapist. She was the one who suggested they meet at the Bluebird because it was a short distance from her house. Just in case she had to make a quick-get-away. Lena didn't like driving at night, especially when it was raining. She hoped when she had the cataract operation her vision would improve. When Al was alive he did all the night driving until the night he jumped the crosswalk and came close to hitting the kid on a bicycle. Then Lena was forced to take over. Of course, by then, Al was too sick to go anywhere.

Friday nights the diner was packed. Lena and Marty filed past highchairs, groups of noisy teenagers, a spattering of singles, elderly couples more fixed on their food than each other, and found a table close to the kitchen. Marty took her raincoat, hung it on top of his overcoat. She immediately picked up the menu and studied him behind the list of appetizers and entrees.

"Seems like a nice enough place," he said.

"Yes. It is." She raised her eyes, then lowered them again. She felt herself flushing like a school girl. The whole thing is ridiculous she told herself remembering the knife she tucked in her purse.

"Food any good?"

"Not bad for a diner." She'd have the Caesar salad with the grilled salmon.

While the waitress stood by to take his order Lena took inventory: the overbite made his upper lip protrude. You couldn't tell much about teeth from a photograph. His hair was snow white, but thinning. Al was bald by the time they had Diane. The photo she'd posted was the one she'd taken when she left the group practice and went out on her own. Six years ago. A lifetime. Then Al got sick and he needed her 24-7. Al, the love of her life. She knew he was dying, but when it finally happened, all the lights had gone out. Everything changed. Taking off her wedding band, that was the first step in a series of life's redefinitions. *Widow. Widow.* She hated the word. And surrounding herself with other widows, over-scheduling herself with lunches, dinners,



bridge games, insisting on babysitting for Diane just to fill her time. She looked at the stranger she met on-line who was now sitting across from her in the diner.

"I never dreamed I'd stoop to this level."

"Sorry. Did you say something?"

"Oh," she said startled. "No."

"Ladies first." He pointed to the waitress waiting to take her order.

"I'll have the Caesar salad with grilled chicken. Dressing on the side, please."

"What do you sell the most of, honey?"

"The special tonight is meatloaf. It's pretty popular. Comes with fried potatoes or some folks like it with grits."

"Fraid I don't eat meat."

"Well, there's pasta primavera. And the soup of the day is minestrone. I could check if it's vegetarian."

"That's ok, honey. Bring me a bowl of the minestrone and a veggie burger. No fries. You can substitute a house salad."

"The salad will be extra."

"Not a problem." He winked at the waitress.

Lena wasn't put off by Marty's flirting with the girl who was young enough to be his daughter. "He's just being friendly or showing off," she told herself. *What was it Marty did for a living?* The one time they talked on the phone, he said something about commercial kitchens or was it appliances? *Did he own a business?* She'd ask. It would fill up the gap.

She was right about the commercial kitchens. When he was done talking about the problems at work, he asked her about her counseling practice and insisted on calling her Dr. Lena the rest of the evening. They talked politics a bit. Al loved to talk politics. She tried brushing Al away from her thoughts.

Marty had finished off his veggie burger and watched her pick at her salad. "All those foreign cars in the parking lot. That's what's killing America."

She was about to tell him that she drove a five-year-old Honda that hadn't given her a lick of trouble when the wail from the baby at the table across the way saved her from a heated debate that she was glad to avoid.

"Do you have any grandchildren, Marty?" she asked brightening.

"My son has two kids. Tom's out in L.A. My other son's divorced. No kids, thank God. The woman he's dating has two." Marty curled his lip.

She noticed him eying the breadbasket and moved it towards him. "It does get complicated," she agreed. "Our Annie is three." It was awkward not knowing how much to reveal -- to disclose disappointments, the horrendous cost of in-vitro, the pain of losing Al. Jackie had warned her, "Keep things light. Focus on new beginnings. No man wants to hear about your late husband or your hemorrhoids."

"Did you see that?" Lena pointed to the table across the way. "That mother just poured soda in the baby's bottle."

Marty, it turned out, was under the care of a nutritionist. Lena feigned interest when he preached about the benefits of a vegetarian diet. Did she like to walk?

"Well, yes, but my goodness, not five miles a day," she gasped because Marty's idea of staying fit was a five mile jog, rain or shine. By dessert (fruit for Marty, a guilt-laden slice of cheese cake for Lena) they'd exhausted food allergies, the benefits of yoga and destinations on their bucket list, and, gratefully, left the diner about the same time the baby was bundled into his carrier.

Lena smiled at the young couple lingering over coffee as if to say, "Well, you're not the only ones, you know."

He walked her to the Honda. Marty took her key and opened her door. "Well, thank you for a nice evening," she said.

"I'd like to call you." He stood there looking, she thought, kind of boyish.

"That would be lovely." The dark hid her blush. The motor her palpitating heart.

By the time she got home the rain had stopped. Lena kept telling herself it didn't matter if Marty didn't call. The next day when she changed her purse, her fingers grazed the blade of the kitchen knife. Would she have a chance to tell Marty how



silly she'd been? And when Marty called the next day, it was like thinking she'd failed an exam and finding out she'd passed with flying colors. They went to the movies that Friday. The next Friday she invited him to her house for dinner. By dessert, she'd already made up her mind she'd sleep with Marty Bower. He left around twelve. Lena thought about her decision to go to bed with Marty. She wasn't in love with Marty. Was she lonely? Was it just missing Al and needing a man to make her feel womanly? She tried to reason away her guilt, but there was no guilt to reason away. Before closing her eyes, Lena stacked the pillow where Marty had lain his head on top of hers and drifted off to sleep.

* * *

Lena's house was up for sale. When she finally got an offer, she and Marty talked about her future plans. They'd been seeing each other every Saturday and Sunday for six months now, and she didn't know where she stood with Marty.

"Diane's going back to work. I adore my granddaughter but I'm not sure I should move in with the kids." Of course she was fishing, hoping Marty would suggest she move in with him. Instead he said, "You're lucky to have gotten your asking price."

Lena did not mention moving in with him again. There was no point in pushing Marty. But then, one evening, when she'd exceeded her quota of wine, she blurted, "What do you say to our living together, honey?"

Marty pinched his lips together which exaggerated his overbite. "I don't know, Lena. I've been a bachelor for so long." "Exactly," she laughed, putting his arm around her. "Look at this place."

"It's just ... hell, Lena." He removed her arm and picked up the TV clicker.

Suddenly she was cold sober. "You're right, Marty. The more I think about it, it's probably best I stay where I am." But she hated living with Diane, felt like an intruder.

It was awkward having Marty stay over her kids' house so Saturday and Sunday she stayed at Marty's. Jackie asked the same question Lena asked herself. "Why is it you never see Marty on Friday?" Lena became defensive. "I babysit Annie on Fridays so's the kids get a night out. They work all week and deserve some time off." But Diane and Chuck stayed home on Friday. They were too beat to go out and preferred being with Annie. "Second," Lena added, "Friday is Marty's boys night out," although Marty never mentioned a Friday card game or anything that might indicate his Friday's were scheduled.

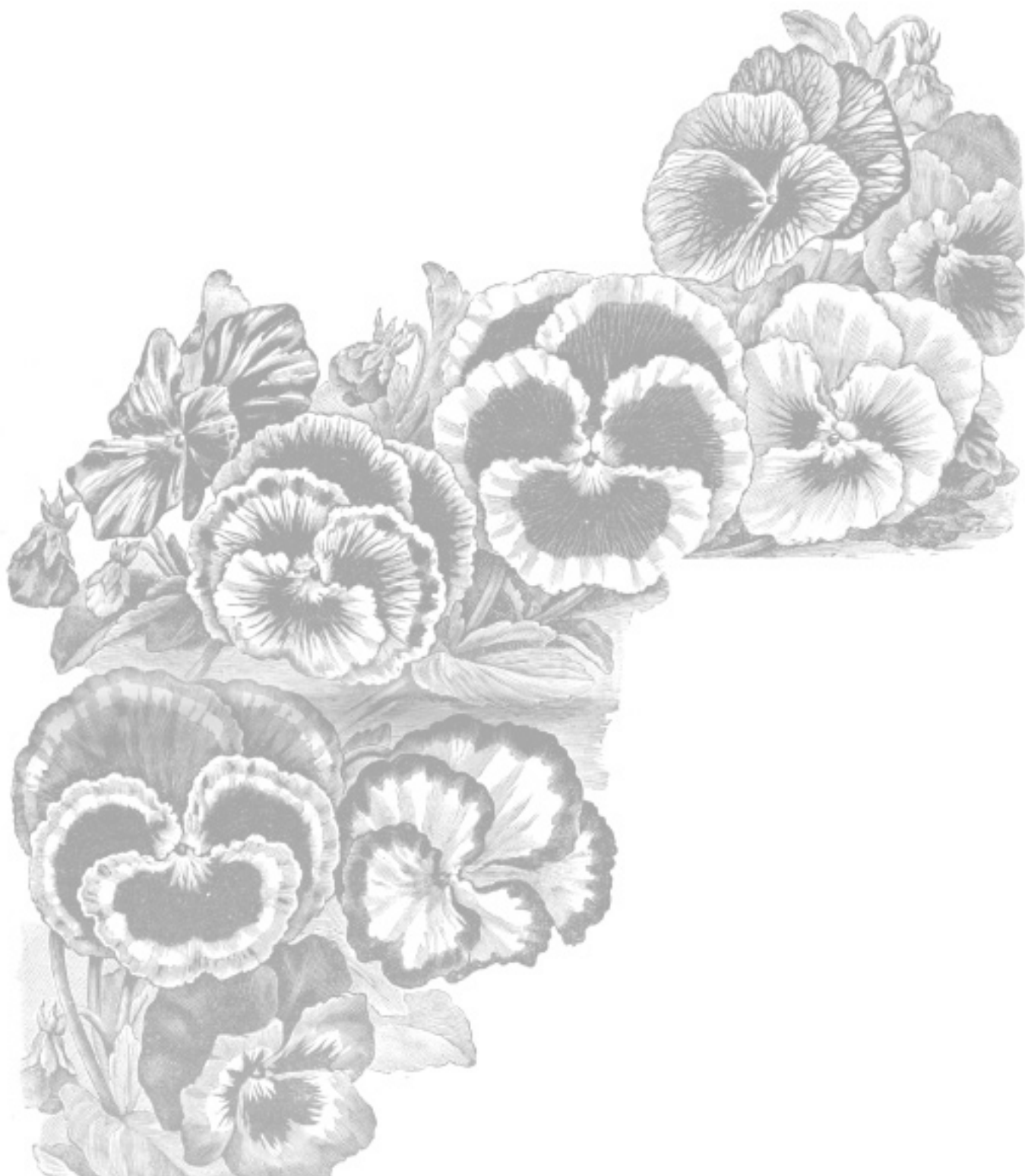
Not knowing what Marty did on Fridays was like an itch she couldn't reach. One Saturday, when Lena was fixing Marty's dinner, she went to his linen closet looking for a clean tablecloth. There, on a lower shelf was a box. The temptation was too great. Lena opened the box. Photographs, dozens of head shots of women Marty printed off the computer. It didn't take long to figure out where Marty got the photos. She sat on the floor and read the accompanying profiles. Some of the women were younger; some about her age. Clipped together were copies of emails. Lena checked the dates. Half were before she'd met Marty, but there were more recent emails. She tried to collect her thoughts. These were the Gal Fridays. She'd been one. It was only a matter of time when Friday would turn into Saturday and Sunday.

Lena remembered something Al once said when she was upset about something – what she couldn't remember. *Things that have happened, have happened; things that are about to happen, will happen; and things that are, well, they just are.*

She put the box back exactly where she had found it. She'd confront Marty after dinner. But she couldn't do it. Instead she went to bed with Marty. She was full of passion, full of this strange new feeling. She wasn't sure what she felt but it was there. "Marty," she murmured, "I hope you won't be disappointed but the kids have an out- of- town wedding tomorrow. I promised to watch Annie. You don't mind my not seeing you on Sunday, do you?"

Marty stroked her hair. "Of course I don't mind." When he leaned over and kissed her, she surprised him by reaching for his cock. Afterward she turned on her side and stared at the moonlight that streaked like rain on the wall.

Lena waited until Marty was snoring. She got up and dressed in the dark. Before leaving she listened to Marty's quick intake and outtake of breath, and then she opened the door and let herself out. When she got home she turned on the computer and posted her photo. *Gal Friday looking for companionship.*





Slocum's Way

by Ronna Magy

The feel of returning home overtook Leonard Williams, 35, as he drove his new '71 Chevy south down the road toward Jacksonboro. Behind his glasses tears played at the corners of his eyes, and constriction set in his throat, a sore hard lump. His blue shirt lay open, revealing a damp stain where the white undershirt showed through. Bumping along the dirt road pulled Leonard back to Saturday mornings in Mr. Turner's truck, huddled under a worn tarp, warming his hands over a kerosene heater. Things they couldn't buy at the local store: pots, clothes, and sacks of seed forcing Leonard and his neighbors to shop in the white part of town.

"Country. It's real country here." Leonard smiled over at his wife, Janey, as they passed rows of corn and cotton. He gave a knowing sigh. "Ah." A spray of white cotton dust filled the air, sunrays sparkling through the fibers. "You know, like I told you after I talked with Mama this morning, they listen to Gospel, play bingo and go to church. That's the life."

"Leonard, this is the same country we've seen since we left Atlanta," Janey snapped back. South Carolina's no different than Georgia." Her glazed brown eyes stared out the front window as the car bumped along the dirt road, mosquitoes splotches dotting the glass.

"Honey, I know you want me to meet your mother," she said almost sweetly, "And I'm glad she goes to church. But I am tired of looking at greens and cotton. We haven't seen a sign for hours and nothin's on the radio but static."

Out the corner of his eye Leonard watched Janey blot the sweat from her forehead. Her bottom lip thrust out a bit, bruised with resentment for having to take her vacation in the South.

"Aren't we there yet? I don't really care anymore about seeing the family or eating anyone's cobbler."

"Almost there. Mama lives down this road, past the store and through those trees. Remember now, I told you it's different here. And things probably haven't changed much since I left." He looked at the city girl next to him with the long dark legs, purple suede shorts and matching top, and for the umpteenth time wondered what his mother would think of the woman he'd married. They were on vacation, he'd taken time away from delivering the mail, but would it really be a vacation, or would his mother disapprove of Janey the way she'd never liked any of his high school girlfriends.

"Did you grow up on a dirt road?"

Janey's question brought him back.

"Um hm," he nodded, "At the end of this one, in the Negro section."

"Um-um-m." Janey shook her head and looked out through the trees. "The Negro section." A large snake sidled in a lapping motion through the trees close to her side of the car.

"Leonard, is that a snake?" Her voice rose.

"Yep. Big rattlers here. Watch out before you open the door."

"Leonard, are you sure you want to go back?"

"Of course. Mama lives here. This trip is for her to meet you, so we can talk about her moving to Los Angeles."

"But I am covered with dust and I need a bath. And I sure don't want to meet any snakes on my way out of the car!" Janey brushed invisible snakes from around her ankles and squirmed. "And what if she doesn't like me? What if I'm too different for her? You said she liked things clean and neat, and I'm a mess."

"She'll like you, Janey. You're the best thing's happened to me since I left for Korea. You'll take a bath at cousin Pearl's. She lives 'cross the road."

"Your mama doesn't have a tub?"

"She has a bathroom outside. Oh, she has a tub, but you have to pump the water and boil it. That's where she did



all those white peoples' washing all those years. In that tub. It'll be easier to go 'cross the road to take a bath."

"I didn't know you grew up like that." Janey frowned.

"Mama don't want an inside bathroom. I sent her money from Korea, but she used it to have her bedroom made larger. Never put in a bath. She's fixed in her ways."

"Leonard, I grew up in the projects. We were poor, but we had a bathroom and toilet inside. How could anyone live without a bathroom in the house? It isn't civilized."

Leonard pulled the car up into a gas station and market just past the four-way flasher and looked round. "Well, here's the old market." The word, STORE, painted in faded red letters on dull white enamel set above the door frame, veins of rust lacing across the dusty white surface. "Guy that owns this place is as mean as a hungry rattler. Don't pay him no mind. We'll be in and out in no time."

"Sure is an old store," Janey commented eyeing the wooden door frame and the dusty window glass. "Does anyone ever shop here?"

"Everyone. It's the only store around." He paused and sighed, wishing for just that moment to see cousin Al walking down the road. "You see these trees? That's the big wood. I used to hunt there with cousin Al. He taught me to shoot. Could hear a squirrel standing still and the sound of leaves as they fell. Al was like my father after Daddy died. When I got back from Korea, Al was dead."

"What happened?"

"Some say it was a hunting accident. I never believed that. He walked the woods like he lived there. Then again, he did things his way. White folks here don't like that." Leonard shook his head and turned to push down the door handle so he could get out.

It was a humid August day, and as Leonard opened the door to stretch his legs, he brushed a few mosquitoes away from his face and arms. Leonard breathed in and waited for the smell of wet earth to fill his lungs. As he let the air out, a clucking sound came out from deep in his throat. "That's how me and Al used to call them squirrels," he smiled.

A man came over to pump the gas. "Afternoon," Leonard said to the man. What was his name? He was as familiar as a worn pair of shoes grown small, his skin as red and white and freckled as it had been in Leonard's memory.

The gas man stared at Leonard through lenses dusted with dirt, wiped his forehead and hands on a faded red rag streaked with engine oil, and grunted something about the hot day.

"Three dollars of gas," Leonard told him, adding the word "please" at the end. The man opened the tank, stuck the silver nozzle in the spout and began pumping. The faded gas pump with the green Sinclair dinosaur dinged as each 99¢ rolled over to a dollar. Leonard counted the 1-2-3 in his head, three times the bell rang, numbers turning over with rusty creeks, no other sounds coming or going along that road, that time of day. The arm in the beige uniform took the red rag and smeared some streaks into the dust on the front windshield. Slocum, his name was Slocum, Leonard remembered. Not clean, Leonard noted silently, saying nothing.

An older man with skin the color of salted earth walked out the door of the store. The rusty wire of the screen sprang slowly behind him.

"Bring them greens tomorrow, Fred." Slocum told him.

"Sure will," the man nodded. "Um hm," he said, shuffling down the dusty road, loaf of bread under his arm. "Sure will, Mr. Slocum."

"You all from out of town?" Slocum stared at the black and gold license and the new car as he asked the question.

"Um hm. California. Drove four days," Leonard said as he took three dollar bills out of his wallet and motioned the bills toward Slocum. "Drove down through Charleston."

"That'll be \$3.50," the gas man said, wiping his hands with the red rag. Leonard cleared his throat. "Pump says



\$3.00. How come it's three-fifty?" He hooked his thumbs in the front pockets of his trousers.

"You know, cleaning the window takes time, then there's taxes and all," Slocum answered, a smile held back on his lips, canine teeth showing out under the rosy line. "Gotta pay those taxes." The white man came a step closer and looked Leonard straight in the eye as he spoke. Leonard stared back for a moment, and then, looking down, took out the coins. That was the way it was in Jacksonboro.

Janey watched through the rolled-down frame of the car window. Resting her right elbow on the gold paint and silver metal of the door, she licked her fingertips and wiped some dust off her elbow. None of the conversation was clear. She only saw that after Leonard took his wallet out of his back pocket to pay, he paused, asked the gas man a question and then gave him more money.

"Leonard. Leonard, I need to get out and stretch," she called, and without waiting, swung the passenger door open, long dark legs and feet in brown leather boots emerging first. She pulled down the legs of her wrinkled shorts and stood next to the car for a moment scanning the land. Summer heat filled the empty spaces in her lungs. Then Janey walked across the dirt and up to the half-open screen door, her brown purse clutched between her fingers.

"Didn't you say your mother wanted some bread and milk and collard greens?" she called back over her shoulder. Swinging the old screen open, Janey vanished inside before Leonard could answer.

Inside the store, it smelled of old wood and vegetables. She opened the icebox and rested the metal door on the patch of dark skin showing between her shorts and matching cropped top. She took out a quart of whole milk.

"Do you know where the ice cream is?" she asked an older black man standing near the refrigerator. His finger silently pointed her over to the other side.

"Oh, thank you. Wonder why I didn't see that." She laughed nervously. "I'm not from here," she smiled. "I'm from Los Angeles." She spoke faster now, looking over his shoulder at the cooler.

Placing the milk between her left elbow and the skin above her shorts, she hummed, "Momma said there'd be days like this," as she walked past the fresh vegetables and over to the freezer. She lifted the lid and picked out a Drumstick and an Eskimo Pie and then, decided "No" on the Eskimo. Leonard would have to pick out his own. She reached down to a lower shelf for a bag of chocolate chip cookies and a can of corn, loaded them under her left arm and flicked some dirt off the tops of her black boots.

Several dark-skinned men wearing overalls or Levis stood around the store unmoving, their eyes following her as she picked things off the wooden shelves and deposited them on the counter. "There'd be days like this my momma said," she hummed it softer now. Why are they all looking at me and saying nothing, Janey wondered. Her hand ran backwards through her natural as if pushing the curls into place. A fan buzzed from behind the cash register.

"Lady, can I help you?" the storeowner boomed upon his return from pumping Leonard's gas. He pulled a clean white apron over his beige uniform.

"No, I'm just helping myself." She spoke quickly as if she were still home in Los Angeles, "You go on and help them. I guess they need help," she said pointing to the others. She took down a loaf of Wonder Bread and squeezed it through the wrapper to see if it was fresh. The aroma filtered out and hung in the hot air inside the store. That was all she needed, she guessed.

The eyes of the customers in line stayed fixed on her. Some eyes rolled towards each other along with a raise of brows and tilt of the head as if to comment, but there were no sounds other than her voice,



the white man's voice, and the tick of the clock. Time was three going on four.

"Do you have any more greens? These look old," she called to the store man. There was no response.

"Janey, come here." Leonard's voice came from near the screen door at the back.

"Just a minute 'till I find these things. You wanted me to make dinner, didn't you? These vegetables don't look very good."

"Janey, get over here, now," he growled.

"Didn't you say your mother wanted milk and greens?"

"Yeah, but c'mere now." She saw the outline of his head and his teeth white against the dark shadow.

Janey walked to the back where he was standing. She looked up at him, tall, and thin, lips pursed tightly together.

"What do you want, Leonard? In the car you told me to get the stuff for your mother."

"You can't do that here," he told her this in a voice that sounded like the growl of an angry dog. "All these people in here are waiting to be waited on."

"Why?"

"He has to get it for you. That's the way it's done here."

The woman's eyes looked over at the people in the line. A man shifted noiselessly from one leg to the other inside a pair of worn overalls. Another shoved his hand deep in his pocket as if looking for a lost good luck coin. The old man near the refrigerator muttered, "Um, um, um," the way old folks do seeing young people trying to change old ways, and then, turned back to wait on the store man.

"Leonard, what are you talking about?" By now, her voice had risen over the silence. "This is a market, isn't it? In a market you get your food, take it to the counter, and pay."

"You don't want to make it bad for Mama, do you?"

"Why would buying food make it bad for your mother?"

"Who you visiting?" Slocum interrupted, scratching his chin and humming under his breath. Standing behind the counter now he looked taller, his eyes bluer. Leonard walked over to him.

"My mother." Leonard spoke the words clearly as if talking to someone having difficulty hearing. "How much do I owe you for the food?"

"Well, now, who is your mother?"

Leonard hesitated. "Miss Josie. Josie Davis."

There was a pause. "Yep. I know Miss Josie." Slocum waited a moment and then nodded, his hand tapping the dark wood counter. "Nice woman. Lives down by the creek in the big wood. Next to the Reed place and the old Wallace property. Lives alone now, don't she?" Leonard nodded, feeling the hair stand up on the back of his neck.

"Lotta snakes down by that creek. Cottonmouths and rattlers round them cypress. Dangerous living alone. Specially where them cypress grow down into the swamp. When those snakes hang down from the trees, you gotta watch out. Old man Richards was shot there, in '63. They found him floating in that swamp around them big roots."

Leonard's hand shook as he pulled the money out to pay. Old man Richards, his daddy's friend, the teacher. Pounding on the door that night, Richards wet and shaking. His daddy, a minister, putting his arm round the man's shoulders saying, "Some these white folks here are mean. Don't want children educated. You'd better get outta town 'fore they get you." And then the door slammed. There



was a wet space where Richards had stood and the smell of damp wood remained in the air. Sam Richards, a secret Leonard never spoke about. Even mentioning his name put the snakes back in Leonard's stomach.

"Why, Miss Josie's been coming here for years," Slocum continued. "Don't get around real good since her foot got cut. Diabetic. Cousin brings her in the car when she needs something. She was here last Monday asking for corn and sweet potatoes. Don't owe me like some of these folks do. You her son? One went out to California?"

"Yes."

The owner stood behind the counter, hands pressing into the worn wood. His right index finger moved down the list. "Nope. Miss Josie's been good 'bout paying her bills here. Been good. Course, it wasn't always that way. Wasn't always that way, was it Ted?"

"No, suh," an old man said, nappy gray head looking down, eyes on the floor.

"How much you figure you owe me now, George," he asked the next man in line.

"Bout \$150.00, Mr. Slocum."

"You gonna pay up soon?"

"Soon's I can," said the man. "My son'll bring you more collard greens tomorrow."

Janey looked down the line of customers, from face to face. Strange, almost none of them had said a word from the time she entered. They only talked when Slocum asked them a question.

The storeowner's blue eyes locked on Leonard's. "You better give your woman some lessons 'bout Jacksonboro, boy. Things are different here. Boy, you remember I gave your family credit when your daddy died. When you had no place to buy food. Nobody else gave you credit, did they?"

"No," said Leonard.

"Your mama buys here. No other place'll take care of her like I do. No other place for fifteen miles and she don't drive. You understand me?"

"Yes," Leonard's voice was lower now.

Janey stood silently by. A chill crept up her spine as it did when she was stopped by the police back home. "I'm so sorry," she said to the store owner. "I am so sorry," she said, the truth of the situation dawning on her. "I did not know." She emphasized the "so sorry" and the "not," as if the words had new meaning.

"Um, um, um," muttered the man in line whose eyes still rested on the floor.

"She didn't know," Leonard repeated out loud. Then, he sighed and shook his head.

"That's all right, boy," Slocum told him. "You being Miss Josie's son and all. So long's we understand each other now."

"How would I know the way it is here? You never told me!" Janey fussed at Leonard as she got in the car. Leonard sighed. He set the milk, bread, and rest of the groceries on the back seat. Leonard gripped the steering wheel, his palms sweaty, and turned to his young wife.

"There I was apologizing to a white man for touching his food!" Janey talked faster now, her voice shrill. "He's no better than I am! Is that how you were treated growing up? White folk afraid of your black hands touching their things? Wait till my mama hears about this!" She rumbled around in her purse, pulled out a tissue, and began to dab at the perspiration on her face.

"What ever did happen to that man, Richards?"



"Richards had a school for Negro kids. Taught 'em to read and write. White folks didn't like that. He came to our house one night and daddy tried to help him run. Later, we heard shots down by the creek. Next day, Richards was dead. My father made me promise never to talk about it."

"Leonard, these white folks here are dangerous! Why does your mama stay here when folks are so bad? Why would any black folks stay in this town? Didn't anyone ever hear about civil rights?" She looked at Leonard as if for the first time.

"Janey," he sighed. "Think about mama. What if you'd grown up in Jacksonboro? And all your family lived there. And your friends. And your church. And now you're old, and have sugar, and can barely walk."

As Leonard looked over at his young wife, a slow smile played around the corners of his mouth. There would be a lot for them to talk about on this trip, not just about mama and growing up, and not only about Mr. Slocum and the old men in the store, but about customs older than dirt, and the ways of life in this part of the South.



Favorite Doll

by Alarie Tennille

I wouldn't let Mama
return her. "I love you just
the way you are," I whisper

to Amanda. Tucked into bed
beside me, covers up to her chin,
you can't tell her feet and hands

point backwards. She can do
pushups in her sleep. At tea
parties, she sits looking like

a werewolf in a gauzy dress.
Sometimes I brush my hair
over my face to look like her.

"You're an odd child," says
Mama. Amanda takes
after me.



Stranger than Sin

by Latorial Faison

While busy
with our ways

Daddy disappeared
to a place he couldn't have
dreamed of

left a simple life
or *it left him*

silently

not beneath the shade
of his favorite tree

not a six pack
within his reach

just...
total loss
of a way of life

His



The Atrocity of Sunsets

by Melba Major

I've abandoned all
I ever knew,
yet darkness still comes
tight and early.
I hear a stampede of angels
through the trees,
then a stillborn silence.

Fall slipping into winter
reminds me of those nights
my mother spoke
to the ceiling.

Outstretched wings of
red and gold shimmer above.
The wind's low groan
is mother's "Sweet Chariot,"
half-sung, half-moaned
as she rocked me to sleep
begging the angels to come.

When I think of death,
I feel her arms.



The Bomber Pilot's Daughter

by Leatha Kendrick

is born knowing lift, believes in flight,
its inevitability, under the right
conditions, at certain speeds,
knows things take off, loves
the instant wheels leave earth,
understands things survive even
the crash, the loss of everything
you thought was true. Her father flew.
True he rained bombs on medieval
cities, on mothers, the machinery
of war. Innocent child. Yes, he could kill
what he never saw. She accepts this truth.
There's killing we do whether we know we can
fly or not. No matter. She trusts in what rises.



Buffalo Nickel

by Joyce E. Kelley

On every other sun-soaked morning
Beside a stretch of Alabama road
The bison stands, flank forward,
Ignoring cars with stubborn resolve,
Tail bobbing, ears flicking, shoulders heavy,
A shuffling, hulking roadside anomaly
Rejecting motorists' carrots with a proud snort.

But today he meets his match—
A biker dressed in black cruises up
All the way to the chain link,
Engine ripping February sunshine;
They stand, heads together,
Both braggarts clad in leather,
Hide-worn, world-weary
Rebels penned behind fences of limitation.

And now, the challenge:
One glowers, one paws the ground,
Both consider their horns as they lock
Brown eye to brown eye,
Long manes whipped back, grizzled, wind-blown.
Once wild infidels of the open land,
Man and beast now stand as sides
Of the same worn coin,
Antique curiosities,
The recipients of children's pointed fingers.



Memorial Day Stateside, The Suburbs

by Joanna Grant

I haven't felt this kind of humid since I left Japan.
It's only the first long weekend of summer and we're
all so tired already. We float aimlessly in Phyllis's pool,
my mother, aunts, and me, hanging on to our floats and drinks.

Aunt Phyllis lives in just two rooms of my uncle's dream house
with her three enormous cats. They sleep in the big glass-walled room
where they kept my uncle's hospital bed, the one looking out
over his beloved beds of roses. When he died they mostly went, too.

My cousin lights another cigarette from the butt of the first.
When she lost all the weight her husband went crazy. Said he knew
she'd been entertaining men. Lots of men. He knew. Dirty and out of work
he's refused to leave the house she pays for, muttering, stalking room to room.

After our swimming party winds down we'll all head home to something,
Aunt Ursula to the quiet quiet house. She still has the twitch and the shiver
in her thin white hands. But some hair has come back in like duckling fluff
since my uncle took to staying at the farm. Drinking. Staring out the window.

My mother and I to the pounding from the basement. Bass and drums. Techno
at four am on a Wednesday. When he gets really bad it's three or four songs
at once. It's pure music better, my brother says. We almost don't hear anymore.
The soldier I kissed goodbye still hasn't called. He won't call they never call.

But that's later. For now we sip our wine in a box and float. And push
the baby back and forth in his little float. He giggles. He's still so young
he can watch us change into our bathing suits. He runs around the pool, not
feeling the heat. We women wilt. In the distance. Fireworks crack.
Like gunshots.



The Intruder

by Linda L. Dunlap

Hallie hears the first knock as she stands in the bathroom in her bra and panties brushing her teeth. It's a tentative tap barely audible over the water gushing into the sink. When she turns off the faucet and stands running her tongue over her minty teeth, the second knock comes, louder and more distinct.

"Sam, someone is at the door. You'll get it?"

"Not this late. You want to see me, you'll get here before eleven at night," Sam says from the bedroom--the stubborn note in his voice is one Hallie knows not to argue with. He sounds tired. He owns the only independent hardware store in town and at sixty-five and overweight, working all day on his feet isn't easy. He'd loved to have had a son to turn the business over to, but a case of mumps in his late teens took care of that. He'd insisted that she come in to help out once she'd retired as librarian at Tyson High. He liked her being useful as well as ornamental, he said. Hallie relinquished her idea of a quiet life of reading after retirement and stood these days behind the counter ringing up toilet plungers and toggle screws. Her life was easier when she did as Sam asked.

"Suit yourself," she says and drops her toothbrush back into the holder. When she hears the front door knob turn, however, she looks up sharply at Sam. He has his head cocked to one side, listening, too.

"Who do you think it could be?" she asks, her voice lower now. The master bedroom sits at the back of the condo, but the place is small and the front door isn't that far away.

"I don't like the sound of that." He sits on his side of the bed taking off his shoes and socks. When he edges closer to the bedside table, Hallie stiffens. A gun lover and staunch believer in the right to defend, not that he'd ever had to but still... he has guns stationed all over the house just in case--his father's double barrel shot gun, the single shot rifle his grandfather left him, the tiny pearl inlaid hand gun he keeps in the bedside table drawer. Years ago in a foolish accident they don't discuss, he shot himself through the right calf practicing his quick draw. It left him with a slight limp. The tiny handgun was supposed to be Hallie's, but she'd have nothing to do with it--the only time she'd had the courage to tell Sam no. Even now, the idea of pointing a gun at someone puts a knot in her stomach. She's tried ignoring the guns, tried to remember her mother's sage advice about how wisdom is knowing what to overlook. Years ago when they first met, she felt a hint of something she couldn't identify in Sam, something that simmered beneath the surface threatening always to boil over. It excited her then, from the moment Sam, the type of man who wouldn't ordinarily look twice at her, marched arrogantly across the dance floor and stopped in front of her rather than Connie Maxwell, who stood beside her, as thin as a letter opener with jutting breasts.

"My name is Grady Donaldson and I've always wanted to live on the corner of Grady and Donaldson Street," Sam said. Of course, his name wasn't Grady Donaldson, it was Sam she was to learn later, but who could resist a pick up line like that? Not Hallie, the new librarian, a shy blonde who'd just moved into a first floor apartment at 22 E. Grady Street, a building located on the corner of Grady and Donaldson.

"May I have this dance?"

"With me?" Hallie asked.

"You!" he replied and aimed an index finger at the imaginary bull's eye stationed over her heart.

With her toes pinched together in pointed sling-backs, she fell in love with him then, marveling at his perfect teeth and the thick brows that hung shelf-like over his bottle-green eyes. To this day, she'd never stopping being grateful to him for choosing her over Connie and her stellar breasts.

A thunder of sound breaks the quiet, a banging so loud the condo trembles. She hears what sounds like a wine decanter shatter in the living room. Sam whips the tiny handgun from the drawer. He walks barefoot to the door of the



bedroom.

"Who's there?" he yells.

The racket stops. A cold chill runs thru Hallie when she remembers that Mr. Chambers in the upstairs condo is still out of town. He's not due back until day after tomorrow. She shrugs into her robe and pulls it closely around her shoulders.

"Who is it?" Sam yells again, his voice is an angry roar and his eyes like huge black holes in his face. When his eyes turn black like they are now, the dark centers expanding until they obliterate the bottle green, Hallie never knows what he'll do. What she does know is that he's capable of anything. Fifteen years ago when his feet became tangled as he whirled to block her from leaving the kitchen, don't you dare walk away from me when I'm talking to you, he'd stumbled and fell, the bone in his arm snapping like a birch twig when he hit the floor. She hadn't believed him when he groaned through gritted teeth, if my arm is broken, I'm telling them you did it. She should have believed him. Later in the emergency room, his eyes like black wells in his pasty face, he'd shouted, "She did it! She pushed me!"

He embellished the accident turning it into a tale of domestic violence in which the police were called and she'd wound up threatened with incarceration. And of course, what she told the detective about the incident probably hadn't helped her case. She hadn't pushed Sam but she was so mad she felt like it.

Suddenly the noise at the front door changes. Rather than the pounding, Hallie hears what sounds like a heavy object slam against the door. She reaches for the phone as Sam yells over his shoulder, "Call 911!"

Hallie lifts the phone just as the front door splinters. She misses the phone, knocks it from its cradle and it lands on the floor. Scrambling beside the bed on her hands and knees, she retrieves it. Her fingers are numb. She has trouble dialing the number. Ring! Ring! Ring! Please answer, please answer, she prays. Behind her, she hears the door rip from its hinges.

"I have a gun! You come inside, I'll blow your head off!" Sam yells.

When the operator finally comes on the line, Hallie's thoughts are jumbled. Where are we? What's our address? At last she stammers, "Someone is breaking down our front door. Yes! Yes! Stonehenge Condo Complex. Number 802. Hurry! Hurry! Please!"

Sam is in the hallway now. "I'm telling you. I have a gun. You come thru that door, I'll kill you!"

A wave of nausea hits Hallie and she swallows quickly. Sam's voice is calm and full of steel. He's not afraid; he's furious.

With a savage roar, the intruder slams thru the door. He is huge, so big that his body fills the narrow hallway as he lumbers toward them. The grimace on his face is one of fixed determination. Is the man insane?

The first bullet hits him in the chest, the second in the neck below his chin. Blood spurts from the tiny hole spraying the wall above the thermostat and the closet door. He keeps coming, bulldozing his way down the hall. Sam shoots again. The man stops and stares down wide-eyed at the blood bubbling from the hole in his stomach. Then he clutches his belly and crumples to the floor. He crashes forward like a huge oak. His head lands with a thud inches away from Sam's feet.

Methodically, Sam points the gun at the back of the man's head and pulls the trigger. One. Two. Three. Finally when the chamber clicks empty, he looks up at Hallie, his face twisted in rage.

She stands staring at him, her hand clasped over her mouth to hold back a scream. An odd smell like incense crowds the air around her. Finally she whispers, "Did you have to shoot so many times? Did you have to kill him?"

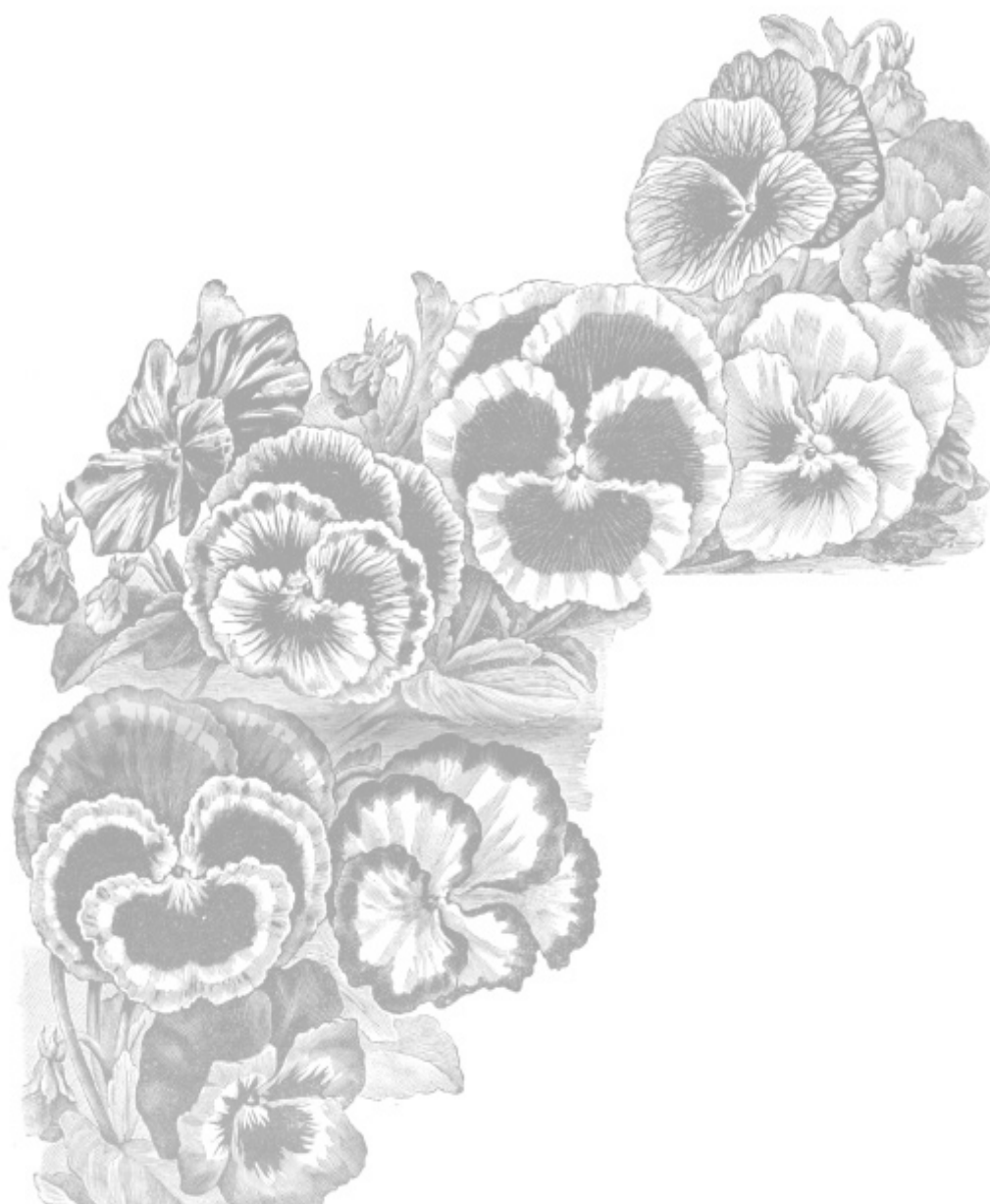
"No, actually I could have winged him in the left arm so he could've raped you using only his right," Sam says with a sneer. Then as Hallie watches in disbelief, he lifts the pistol and blows on the end of it like a gunslinger in a Western movie.



Later when the body has been taken away, the mess of blood cleaned from the walls and carpet and everything is back to normal, the scene keeps playing itself over in Hallie's mind. The huge intruder crashing down the hall, Sam shooting the man in the back of the head again and again and Hallie asking the questions she didn't ask before, Who is this man? Do you know him?

When she and Sam and the young man he'd shot can no longer live together, she leaves.

Every now and again on a night before the sleeping pills kick in and Hallie forgets to direct her thoughts into safe places, she's suddenly struck by the minty taste of toothpaste on her tongue. She's back watching Sam lift the gun to his lips and blow on the barrel. She sees the simmering inside of him finally erupt and is astounded once again at how he relishes every second of the kill.





Sea Monkeys

by Maureen O'Brien

Though she was grateful that he left the gun in their room, Grace still knew that she could set Luke off. She had to keep her mouth shut. It was none of her business whether or not her husband chose to remove his tee shirt to sunbathe. Isn't that what men from New England did on winter vacations in Florida? Blinded by the explosive glare from the swimming pool, Luke wrestled within his tee shirt, flailed, momentarily moth-like, then pulled it cleanly over his head. It had been nine months since he had been hit with the IED while serving in Iraq, but this was the first time Grace had beheld his shattered body in outdoor light.

Behind him, a gray wind darkened the bay to teal as she heard it: the gasps of the other spa guests. "Can you pass me that coconut oil?" Luke asked Tessa. Their teenage daughter gave her belly a quick spritz and handed it to him. Together, they had noisily dragged two metal chairs out of the shadows into full sun. Now Luke pumped and pumped on his stump, rubbing it in, going round over the pointy tip above where his left elbow should have been. A row of coeds in the corner lounge chairs oscillated their enormous tortoiseshell sunglasses to stare directly at him.

Grace rummaged for 35 UV sunscreen in the bag. She was keeping herself in the shade, wrapped up in a sarong. "Do you remember how they warned you?" she asked in a deliberately mild tone. The doctors in Ward 57 had repeatedly stressed that he should never sunbathe because of his skin grafts and scars.

Luke answered her question by ignoring it. He indicated that he needed Grace to help. She lost herself in the fluid movements of her own oily hands gliding around the tennis-ball muscle in his right bicep, down to the hairs of his forearm and the slick articulations of his knucklebones.

"What are you thinking?" she asked.

He tilted his head toward the pool as he glistened, still needing to squint, even with Ray-Bans. "What do think I'm thinking, Grace O'Shea?"

She laughed. "That you don't give a shit about what the doctors said. Or about what anyone here thinks."

He leaned back in the lounge chair, feet out. "That's right. Fuck 'em. Fuck 'em if they can't take a joke."

"Take a joke?"

"I don't know Grace, I'm just trying to be light." That catch of anger flashed in his voice and reminded her of when he had completely lost it in the OT room at Walter Reed, bellowing at her to shut up. "I mean, does everything have to be serious?"

She wanted to shriek, *light, light, light?*

By the third day of their vacation, Grace learned that resort pools were a plum space for intimate conversations, completely uncut. The guests, relaxed and pampered, let their guard down to a point of utter ridiculousness.

Each afternoon, Grace, Luke, and Tess settled into poolside torpor. One day after lunch, a woman a few chairs down didn't bother to lower her voice as she confessed, "I never wanted to be pregnant."

Grace was stunned. Wasn't her child right there in the shallow end of the pool? The woman tugged a cherry stem out of her mouth. "I *had* to marry Paul because I got knocked up with Kennedy. He's a nice guy, but I've been stuck looking across the kitchen table at his big blue cow eyes for eight years." The woman shook her head. "He's a good father, but a douche. And a bore in bed. When I screw him, I picture that hunky actor on *Guiding Light*. You know that guy who plays Seth?"

"I've seen him," the woman's friend replied.

Tess swirled a damp towel over her face to cover her laughter. "Oh my fucking God." Grace raised her Oprah "O" magazine higher, trying to keep her arms steady in spite of her giggling.

"Please Tess."

"Oh God," Tess corrected herself.

Just then the woman's daughter dog-paddled up to the side of the pool. Kennedy was tow-headed with big blue eyes, endlessly



whispering in make-believe on the ladder, a grim expression on her face. She struggled to hang onto the side, pulling herself up.

"Excuse me, mister?" she shouted. "Mister? Mister!"

Luke lifted up his sunglasses as if that would help him hear more clearly. "Are you talking to me?"

Grace noticed the drunk who was at the bar everyday perk up and listen in. With his close buzz cut and bony head, he reminded Grace of a pterodactyl.

"Were you born like that?" The girl persisted, water dripping from her hair darkening the concrete.

"Kennedy." Her mother shot up, legs splayed on either side of her chair. "Stop it right now."

"Were you?"

"No," Luke said.

"Does it hurt?"

"Kennedy. Knock it *off*."

It hurt all the time, Grace knew, because it changed shape constantly.

"No. It doesn't," Luke lied.

"Mister," Kennedy declared, "Your arm doesn't look like an arm." Her voice rose higher, bell-like. "It looks like a-a—a-giant big toe!" She flopped into the water and disappeared.

"What a little bitch," Tess spat. She didn't bother to whisper it.

"You should never call another female a be-otch," Grace protested. "Especially a child."

"Be-otch, Mom? You might as well just say it. Brat doesn't cut it."

Kennedy's mother heard and just leaned forward to inspect her recent pedicure. "She is a little bitch," she confided to her friend. "But it's because she's an only child. And she's going to stay that way."

What was growing in Grace was not another child but tumors. Not cancerous, but tumors nonetheless. She saw them on the Ultrasound right before this vacation. She had not yet told Luke they were the reason why she had been bleeding non-stop. Passing through the hallway's dark curtained rooms of women in early labor, their baby's fetal heartbeats like a bass line, her eyes had welled up at the sound. Stripped from the waist down, wrapped in paper covering her lower half, the technicians probed her internally with a "wand". The technicians steered the wand around—they actually called them the "corners" of her vagina-- and as Grace watched on the screen, her uterus was a shifting tide. Where once Tessa swiveled inside her, now tumors with cartoonish features leered in and out of view like Sea Monkeys invading her, leaping in the air and landing on their hands, their foreheads shaped like crowns.

As a young child Grace had wanted Sea Monkeys so badly. On the backs of comic books a perfect family unit grinned undersea. Her mother would not allow her to buy them because she believed the ads were lies. They did not follow beams of light or dance when records played. They were nothing but brine shrimp eggs. But in the caricatured drawing? They beckoned like Grinches. Creepy-looking yes, but Grace had been sure that if she could only send away for them and *Own a bowlful of happiness*--they would befriend her within a clear globe in her hands.

How stupid she was to believe in that. A dumb little bitch. She felt them preening now inside her, felt the blood rush along the sides of the sticky adhesive of her maxi-pad pressed to the crotch of her one-piece bathing suit.

A tall pale man lumbered out from the lobby with horrible posture and jiggly upper arms like a woman. Grace murmured, "Tess. Check it out."

Tess poked her head up and laughed. "Paul."

Paul sat on the end of the chaise with his sexually frustrated wife and gazed at her lovingly. She ignored him. Then he feigned gazing at the dusky clouds. Grace knew that look well: the sideways stare at the amputee. Kennedy spun like a little corkscrew on the steps in the shallow end. Her voice rang out, "Daddy, Daddy, Dads Dads Dads! I found out about the *man*. The *weird arm man* you and Mommy were wondering about." She pointed at Luke.

Paul signaled with his index finger for Kennedy to come.

What a fucked up family, Grace thought, and announced curtly, loud enough for Paul and his wife to hear but not Kennedy. "He really is a douche."

Any guilt she might have had for being so uncouth was erased by the pathetic tears that filled Paul's cow eyes, as if on cue. As her parents took her and hastily left to go dress for dinner, Kennedy chirped, "See you Mister."



Luke waved goodbye to her with his stump.

An hour later Tess left to take a nap. Luke and Grace were the only ones at the Safety Harbor Inn pool, holding hands in the cool shadows, until an old woman hobbled out barely lifting her flip-flops along the concrete. The old woman's thighs were so atrophied that the elastic leg holes of her bathing suit didn't even touch her body. Her entire butt was exposed. The spindles of her upper legs reminded Grace of Theo, a double-leg amputee from Walter Reed, and her calves were a mass of lacy blue veins.

"Go ahead and stare," the old woman snorted haughtily.

Grace was ashamed---she had been gawking. The old woman was as feisty and determined as Theo, and she continued to scrape onward. When she lowered herself along the handrails into the water, the surface of the pool did not even slosh. The water reached her armpits. She croaked, "I'm dying. I'll be gone before Christmas." She bobbed over to Luke. "I want to ask you something."

Luke waited for the question about his arm.

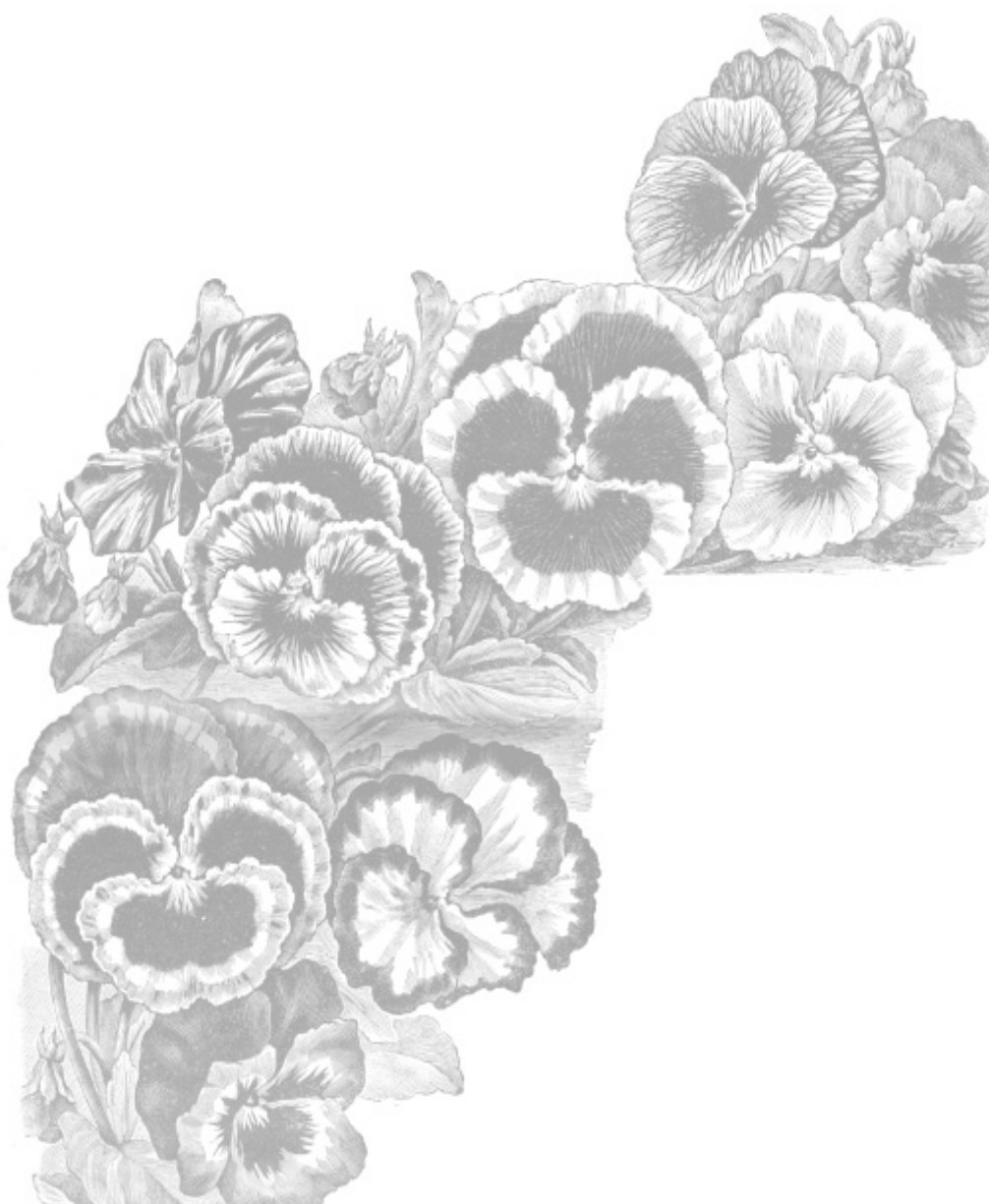
"Would you believe I was once Miss Brooklyn?" she asked hostilely.

Luke suddenly stood up, adjusted the elastic waistband of his trunks, and plunged headfirst into the deep end, executing a horrible belly flop. It was the first time he had ever attempted a one-armed dive. When he surfaced, splashing the old woman in the shallow end, he enunciated with passion, declaring, "You. Were the best-looking gal in the borough."

Luke's kindness.

For the first time in months, through that winter of his rage, Grace recognized the man she had married, his heart intact though obscured by layers of grief and pain. Grace unwove her sarong and lowered herself down the ladder in the deep end, checking to make sure there was no trail of her own blood against the blue tiles, finding only clear water between her legs.

Stick-arms and stick-legs wide Miss Brooklyn floated on her back in a slow, sighing circle to the middle of the pool. Grace and Luke each took a deep breath and submerged underwater. With their eyes open and stinging, they struggled to swim toward one another, each one pulling and kicking toward the other's dark thrashing shape.





Fog

by Nina Rubinstein Alonso

Sam squints, "It'll burn off."

Leah can't focus her camera on the clouds filling Norwell harbor, cloaking the masts of moored sailboats. She moves the lens to Sam standing on the dock, making neat dots on a chart with his red pen, then puts her camera down without pressing the shutter.

"We may get a little damp, but we'll be in Boston harbor in a few hours," Sam says with a 'no big deal' look on his face. The Seagull is a sixteen footer with a fore-deck that stows spare sails, foul weather gear, extra line, and nothing else. No toilet ("It's a 'head' on a boat," Sam says), no auxiliary motor, no phone, no radio, just three battery lanterns and a box of flares.

"Maybe he's right," Leah says to Jill, who lifts and drops her shoulders. They're not outdoorsy. Leah's a writer teaching at a small college, and Jill's a free-lance graphic designer who illustrates Leah's review column in a regional journal.

Leah and Sam sailed to Falmouth with no problem except when the wind sat down. She tossed peanut shells into the water, one after the other, and watched them float becalmed while the sails flapped empty. Sam won't use a motor, which would spoil 'the purity of sailing.' He notes wind direction, adjusts the tiller, and stays silent for long stretches. She regrets coming on the trip, but not as much as she regrets signing papers before a justice of the peace in March while Eric was still in London.

"Did you hear the weather report?" Jill asks Trevor, who's standing by a bench, studying the place in the sky where the morning sun usually shines. Today the disc of light is layered with gray paste.

"Nope," he says.

Trevor isn't into boating. He'd rather sit on the beach or go for a run, kicking crab shells and seaweed out of his way.

He stands up, stretches his arms and twists side to the side to ease a cramp in his long, muscled back. Six foot three, blond, blue eyed, he needs more exercise than he gets these days. He wears jeans and a black sweat-shirt with a red lobster on the back, and has had enough of this departure crap. "Big wow," he thinks. He didn't want Leah and Sam to stay at all, and forget a second night, despite the rotten weather. He knows things will flare with Jill once they're alone. She used to complain about little things like his cigarette butts left in an ash tray or drinks on the coffee table.

"Beer can rings on my rosewood?" she'd scold.

"I'm a barbarian, so sue me?" They'd get by it, laugh, roll into bed and fuck their brains out. Now their spats stretch into fights that expand into full-out battles that wither into dry islands of silence. They don't speak, and sometimes she'll drive to Boston to stay with her mother. Before Leah and Sam arrived they were shouting.

"How in hell do I cancel an invitation to people sailing without a phone? And she's my best friend," Jill screamed.

"What kind of idiots don't bring a phone or two-way radio?" Trevor snarled.

"Sam's kind of idiot?" Then they hear the buzzer and turn it off.

Leah-- green-eyes, auburn hair--enters the living room giving Trevor slant looks he misreads as chilly. She thinks he's gorgeous, though she's also heard he's a complicated hot-head. For now she's stuck with narrow-limbed Sam, a lawyer like Trevor, though they hardly have that in common. Sam's from a wealthy family, works in corporate law and smokes a briar pipe, which he holds even when empty. He talks sparingly, as if words were cash, and he's not in the mood to spend. His parsimonious verbal style strikes Trevor as condescending, reflecting the prestigious ivy-league schools Sam attended. Trevor worked his way through state schools, and his clients are immigrants and the poor. It's unclear to Trevor how Sam and Leah got together, some sort of quickie elopement, Jill said, though Leah's not even pregnant. The two men repel each other, and Trevor's already in a rotten mood, fed up with Jill's quoting 'communications' books.



"I'm not some hausfrau picking up your dirty underwear the way your mother did," she'll say, referring to the 'fair share of housework' chapter. They used to laugh, drink wine and screw themselves silly. Not lately. He watches Leah and Sam at opposite ends of the gray couch, no heat, no hands touching, no affection, never mind passion, nada. Now they're going to sail into a massive fog like total morons. Trevor turns away saying, "Going for a run," and Jill nods, glad.

"Time to cast off," says Sam, while Leah and Jill tighten their hug. Jill's shorter and rounder than Leah, with curly brown hair and full blue eyes, but somehow the two women, despite different coloring, look like sisters.

"Call when you get in," says Jill. They sat up late on the balcony drinking wine, and Leah whispered, "It was crazy to elope, but Eric was in London, and I felt dumped. Sam was flattering, though the sex can't compare."

"Why complicate things legally? Isn't it bad enough that you ditched Eric because you thought he was ditching you?"

"I know, I know, and he's back. I'll leave Sam, soon," said Leah, "but I don't earn much at Cranhurst or writing my columns, and Eric doesn't earn a lot either."

"So this is going to be about money?"

"More about figuring what's next," said Leah. "Sam was on the rebound, too. I found pictures in his desk drawer, a pretty black woman. Last week in bed he's hitting climax and sighs 'Clarisse' in my ear. He denied it, but I know what I heard."

"Well, I've got different issues with Trevor. This summer sublet ends soon, and I don't know where I'll be next, but I can't get into it with him in the next room," said Jill.

"Time to cast off," says Sam, his voice perky, as if everything is super fine.

"The fog's so thick I can't see the end of the dock. No one's sailing, look around, no one. Let him go by himself," says Jill. Leah pauses. "I steer while he adjusts sails, and it would be harder for him. So let's get it over with."

Jill slowly lets go of Leah's hands and watches them climb into the small white sailboat, push off from the dock and disappear into the fog.

A breeze takes the Seagull out of the harbor gliding through solid cloud. "You didn't have to say that," said Sam, "like surgery, 'let's get it over with.'" Sam adjusts the tiller. "We're moving right along."

Gray wetness floats ghost shapes over the bow, heavy, bone-damp. Time slows down, holds its breath, stops.

"The fog isn't burning off," said Leah. "It's worse than in the harbor."

He checks his watch--nearly ten. "Well, it's not going to be the easy sailing we had before. I'll check the chart." The fog's so dense he has a hard time finding channel markers, and it's eerily quiet with waves sloshing against the side of the boat, sails luffing and flapping in the erratic wind. The boat heels over in sudden gusts, then rights itself, but Sam's not worried because the keel's much heavier and steadier than his old center-board boat.

Leah's furious at herself for going along on the trip, for marrying. She wasn't even drunk, but brushed off pinches of doubt and jumped. "You can't see what's coming, so what's the use?" she snaps, mostly at herself.

Sam adjusts the tiller, squints, says nothing. Leah sips tea from her thermos, wondering how long it will have to last. Sam's profile is outlined by fog, and he's calm, even confident. It's no problem for him to be without a radio or phone or motor, fine to pit himself against the forces of nature in a grand sailing adventure, his kind of game.

"The arrogant bastard!" she thinks, and drifts back to her afternoon with Eric two weeks back. They're by the Charles River on a mild day watching crews pull their oars in neat unison. At first he talks about his post-doc at Brandeis, his London research, courses he's teaching at summer school, a probable full time position in the fall, his brown eyes glancing at her from behind his steel rimmed glasses. She watches his sensitive mouth, his high-bridged nose, as he talks, wanting to touch him, but gripping the straps of her purse instead. His tweed jacket's worn, cuffs frayed, because he rarely spends money on clothes. He'll buy a book and make do with the old coat. That's Eric, the best friend and lover she's ever had, and he's angry.



Finally he stops walking and meets her eyes. "For Christ's sake, Leah, I don't get it. I'm back from my Fulbright year, and you're wearing a wedding ring?" They used to spend days and nights in his room talking, making love.

"You were in London, and it felt like we were done. For a while I thought it could work with Sam." Tears sting her eyes.

"But why legalize? I had a grant to do research and writing and wasn't looking for a quick fuck, though it got lonely. Why didn't you tell me before jumping off a cliff? I thought we had something strong enough to hold us."

"When did we ever talk future? I thought that if you were serious, you'd answer my letters differently, but you didn't, and I took that as a message."

What message? That's why you stopped writing? I had a year to get a British degree, upgrade credentials, start my book. I still have no money for anything. I've invented myself from scratch, unlike your rich, so-called husband. Maybe I should have done things differently, okay, but the timing wasn't right. I told you over and over that I loved you, and I wrote, didn't I?"

"Yes, but even in bed, we never talked commitment."

At the word "commitment," he grabs her shoulders, kisses her so deeply her knees fold, and she drops purse. He holds her, rocks her, kisses her. "I love you," she says.

"I love you, too, but commitment is one of those crazy-making words. What does it mean? Carved in granite like a fucking gravestone? So you eloped with someone thinking we were finished, but we're not. No one replaces anyone else, and your so-called marriage would be doomed even if I was on Mars. How can you stay in this farce?"

Leah picks up her purse and checks her watch, her square-cut diamond sparkling in the sun. She and Sam are going to dinner with his stuffy, boring parents in Brookline. "I've got to leave, but I'll get myself out of this. Sorry if you don't understand how it felt on my end. I'll call," and she walks towards the car-- Sam's blue Volvo-- pausing to see Eric stroll towards the river in his shabby tweeds.

Sex with Sam leaves her sorry she bothered to spread her legs, no love, no fun, no orgasms, and hits a new low when Sam calls her Clarisse.

"Clarisse?"

"What?"

"You said 'Clarisse,' Sam, 'Clarisse.'" Eventually he admits to an affair with the woman in the photos, but claims, "It was over before we met." They've been married one month.

It's absurd sailing in a blinding fog on a boating trip no sensible person would take, made worse because she's with someone she doesn't love who doesn't love her, mistake piled on mistake.

"Scuse me," Sam says, "Got to pee." He hands her the tiller and turns to the side of the boat, fumbling with his LLBean zippers. Disgusted, she looks away and sees something.

"A ship, a big one."

He zips up, rinses his hands in the ocean, then climbs onto the bow of the boat. A deep-voiced bell echoes through the fog, a steady four-beat rhythm, clang, clang, clang, clang--pause-- clang, clang, clang, clang. "An old four masted schooner, probably a training ship." As they go by, they see young men up on the rigging, taking down sails.

"They've dropped anchor. The bells must be a warning boats to stay away," Leah says.

"Right. A big vessel like that has to take precautions in fog," Sam says.

"But our boat's small so we don't need to?" He doesn't take the bait.

They look back at the schooner, a hazy blur of red and green lanterns. "I think we're approaching a harbor, maybe Scituate," says Sam, pointing to horizontal white lights in sets of two, emerging from the fog. "Shit," he hollers, turning the tiller sharply. "Almost ran aground. That's a line of cars with headlights facing out to sea to keep boats from hitting rocks, as you can't see them until it's too late. Dammit, this is the worst ever, and I've been sailing since I was nine."



"I knew it in Norwell, and Jill said the same thing, but you wouldn't listen, and I was a fool to go along with you. You had to have your fucking ego adventure. I'll never forgive you or trust you again, never."

"Rake me over the coals and be as vulgar as you like. How was I supposed to know it would be this bad?" Sam frowns as a blast of wind balloons the sails and streaks of lightning shock the fog. After a few seconds it's thunder and torrential rain.

"We need to tie up somewhere," Leah shouts.

Sam says, "The anchor isn't heavy enough to hold the boat in water this deep. Look for a place to moor."

"That's what I'm doing," Leah yells. The sails snap and flap, and the boom's swinging wildly.

"Damn it, keep your head down, Sam says, "Got to reef the sails."

"Over there, a buoy," Leah points.

"Port side," says Sam maneuvering closer. He tosses a line and misses, makes a loop, trying to catch the top of the buoy, but misses and misses and misses, reeling the line in again and again. "I'll climb out."

Leah grips the tiller while Sam stretches flat, hanging over the side of the boat to get a line through the steel ring. He inches himself back, drops the sails and lashes them tight. "Got to wait it out," he says. Leah's foul weather gear is little help as her t-shirt and jeans were soaked through when she put it on. Eventually the thunder and lightning move off, leaving them in drizzle and solid fog. They've set lamps fore and aft, not sure how long the batteries will last.

"What's that?" she says. Something's pushing through the fog.

"Hey there, need help? I'll haul you to Quincy marina. No fishing today in this mess, just a few mackerel."

Yes, thanks, yes," calls Sam. The Hannah McCoy's a trawler, and, with Joe's help, the Seagull is secured on a tow-line.

"Radio says the worst in a century," calls Joe, a man above fifty in a yellow slicker. "Hundred year fog, and God knows who else is stuck out there."

"We'd be trapped, maybe dead, if not for him," snaps Leah, but Sam squeezes his lips around his empty, upside-down pipe, not about to apologize. It's four in the afternoon and nearly as dark as if the sun never came up.

The marina's shack has a coffee-sandwich bar, and Leah sits shivering, while Sam finds a mooring for the Seagull. How will they reach the car at the Boston Boat Club or get back to the apartment? Never mind. She's alive, privileged to pee in a real toilet in the dingy bathroom. As she sips hot black coffee, the shock deepens, no way to revise or make it better. A mackerel fisherman found them, or they'd be out there, tied to a buoy.

Two gray haired women in glowing orange rain gear are heading home after a curiosity walk in the hundred-year fog. "Awful mess out there," Leah hears one of them say as they leave. The manager pours Leah more coffee and adds, "It's the worst on record, and we're blessed to be on land in one piece. All kinds of accidents on the news, highways backed up, cars deserted. The side roads may be passable, but I'll sleep on the air mattress in the back room if I have to. You say you were on a little day sailer?" The woman has dyed red hair puffed into a pompadour, but her eyes are a fine, clear blue, lashes mascaraed, the way women with pale lashes tend to do. The words make honest sense to Leah, and her eyes fill up.

"I worried about the heavy fog before we left, but my husband was sure it would burn off. I don't know why I got into a boat with no motor."

"Don't go blaming yourself! Were you supposed to walk home?" The woman's name tag says 'Bev' and, feeling her kindness, Leah drops her head onto her hands and sobs.

Jill's in her study finishing the design for Leah's next 'Voices' column, curls of black ink twisting into grape vines and flowers, when Trevor walks in.

"Thought we'd hear from Leah," he says.

"Killer fog all over the news, and you didn't want them to stay another night," says Jill.

"Don't blame me for their dumb-ass decision, that's bullshit," says Trevor. He sits on the edge of a chair.

"It was obvious you wanted to get rid of them," Jill snaps, wiping the tip of her pen with a tissue. "They could drown as long as you have your beer in privacy. What if it was Tom Gold?"



Trevor stands up. "What the fuck does he have to do with anything? Tom's the head of my firm, not your boring writer friend and her snotty prick of a husband." He stomps into the hall, sees the white porcelain statue on the top shelf, flicks it with his fingers, and Kwan Yin, goddess of mercy and compassion, hits the floor.

"What?" Jill runs to the doorway. "My mother brought that for me from Hong Kong, and don't bother pretending it's an accident on that high shelf."

"I don't give a flying rat's ass."

Jill looks away from the fragments, stomps to the bedroom and grabs her green suitcase, already half packed as she's on her way to Boston for a few days. "The goddess of compassion, for Christ's sake!"

He walks into the study and slams the door, staying away or he'll swat her, not just a stupid statue. He whacks the arty sea-shell lamp she gave him for his birthday and watches it shatter against the filing cabinet, then starts to kick the aqua wall, leaving a row of holes. It's a summer rental and he'll have to fix or pay, but he slows down only when his old ankle fracture--from a bad slide into home base during a baseball game--starts to ping.

By then Jill's backed her car past the wall of purple morning glories. Dense fog muffles the highway, and the trip to the city's a crawl. Her mother's flying back from a funeral in Vancouver, but Jill has a key. When she and Trevor decided to rent the sublet, her mother was relieved they didn't talk of a wedding. Her diplomatic comment was, "Such a handsome young man, dear, like a movie star, but you two are very different." She doubted that sharing an apartment for the summer would improve their rocky relationship.

Leah and Sam ride next to Joe McCoy in his refrigerated truck, inching along foggy side roads, flashers blinking, grateful that the boat club is on Joe's way home. "You don't have to tell me the truck stinks of fish," Joe says.

"Smells good to me because you rescued us," says Leah. "I'll never be able to thank you enough."

"Got to say I was surprised to see a pip-squeak daysailer tied up to a metal buoy in all that lightning," says Joe with a wink at Leah. Sam coughs, clears his throat, coughs some more, missing his pipe, lost somewhere. Joe's giving him a sailor's jab, saying that what he did was not just wrong, but terminally stupid.

"I didn't have a lot of choice," Sam says, "and I used heavy line. I had to get the sails down, and my anchor's too light to hold the boat in a storm. We'd have been dragged."

"Ball lightning can roll right down a line, but I suppose you did what you could with what you had," Joe replies, without a trace of pity. "We'll hear stories on the news." Joe drops them at the Boston Boat Club and hands Leah a thick packet of mackerel wrapped in newspaper. "A little oily, but nice on the grille," he says, and she thanks him, holding the sticky bundle away from her wet jacket. Sam knocks, but the Boston Boat Club's dark and locked tight. He'll have to come back tomorrow or the next day and have the Seagull towed in.

They walk in silence down the road to Sam's blue Volvo, throw their duffels-- and the fish-- in the trunk and drive at a snail's pace along side roads, avoiding the highway, solid with deserted cars. They can see barely a few feet in front of them because the headlights make the fog glow, bouncing the light backward into their eyes. By the time they reach Brookline Village, it's one a.m.

Leah looks at the living room's square walnut furniture, brown upholstery and beige drapery, as if she'd never seen the place before and doesn't like it--his apartment before she moved in, entirely his taste, unaltered by months of her presence. She pulls off her wet clothes, throws them across the side of the bath tub and pulls on a black sweatshirt and blue jeans. She's dazed, chilled, shaky.

"Come to bed and warm up," says Sam, standing in the doorway in his underwear.

Leah pushes by him, yanks off the striped bedspread, grabs a pillow, takes the blue blanket, walks to the living room, throws the couch bolsters onto the floor and lies down.



"What?" Sam asks.

"Getting some rest." She turns her back on him and shuts her eyes, feeling a churning motion in her body as if she's still rocking on that damned boat.

"Leah, you can't blame me," Sam said.

"I can't? Why not? You're responsible, guilty as charged," she says. "Go away." She's waiting for the queasiness of waves to stop, the inner fog to dissipate and convince her she's on dry land.

"Will you feel better if I admit I made a miscalculation?" Sam says.

She turns over and looks at him, a clown in his white undershirt and blue boxers with those little red anchors, bow-legged, which no one can see in his well-tailored suits.

"Miscalculation? How about the truth? You made choices that could have killed us, and my mistake was letting you decide and going along. I'm done. Leave me alone."

"What are you saying? You're tired and upset. We'll talk in the morning."

"It's morning now. Get away from me, just go." And Leah turns over, hoping to doze.

She startles awake, urgent to get out of there, with no idea of the time as the sky's gray and heavy. She has her purse, a dry jacket and sneakers by the couch, but needs things in the bedroom. From the doorway she sees his pillow and blanket, but no Sam, and he's not in the bathroom or kitchen, no coffee beans grinding, no espresso maker hissing, and no keys on the bureau.

"Dammit, he took the car," which Leah was going to drive to Cambridge, but she'll walk to the T. She fills her duffel and backpack as fast as she can, no time to call anyone as she's wants to be gone before he gets back. Maybe he's buying food because the refrigerator's empty except for mackerel.

She pushes her wallet, checkbook, phone and t-shirts into her backpack, then stuffs jeans, underwear and her jewelry case into the duffel. She'll come back for the rest, but not alone. "Goodbye, fish," she says, locking the apartment door, and heading down the back stairs to avoid the elevator Sam uses. On her way to Beacon Street, she hides behind a tree when she sees a blue car, but in an hour she's in Harvard Square at the Mango Cafe. The sign says 'open at ten,' so she walks to Starbucks, orders a latte and sits down next to her pack and duffel, exhausted. "Hey, Leah," says a voice from the next table.

The man in a blue tie-dyed top and torn jeans looks in his twenties, clean shaven, bleached hair cropped nearly to the scalp. Slowly she recognizes Vinnie Murano. "What's up?" he says, his green eyes glassy. Stoned or drunk?

"Didn't know you with blond hair." At college they had some classes together, and he had long dark hair and a red-dish biblical beard.

"So what's happening with you these days?" he says.

Leah stares at the froth on her latte wishing she could lie down and relax on a big foamy mattress. "Big changes," she says.

"Weird running into people from school, last night Jill, now you."

"Jill?"

"Wasn't she your roommate?"

"I just saw her in Norwell."

"So maybe it was her twin here in Starbucks? Ciao," and he pulls a baseball cap onto his head and walks his baggy pants out the door.

Leah finds her phone and sees a missed call--Jill.

Sam opens the apartment door cautiously, not wanting to wake Leah, who's bent out of shape from their sailing misadventure. He slept a few hours, then got up to buy croissants, dark roast coffee, the New York Times, make her a nice



breakfast. He puts the bags on the hall table and peeks into the living room. The pillow holds the shape of her head, and the blanket's on the floor, but he can't believe she won't be back. He'll have coffee ready, smooth things over. "Where would she go with no car?" Her upsets don't usually last, but she can be dramatic. Clarisse is calmer, but couldn't handle the family situation. No use telling Leah. Why give her more ammunition than calling her Clarisse in bed? It's complicated with Clarisse, and he needs time sort it out.

"Hey, Leah," Vinnie calls from the doorway of Starbucks, "need a ride?"

"Maybe." Leah's about to phone Eric when a call comes in from Jill.

"I'm at my mother's on Charles Street. Big blow up with Trevor."

"I'm at Starbuck's in the square with my back pack and duffel. Barely survived the fog, and I left Sam."

"Thank God you're alive. Come on over. Remember my mom's building around the corner from the antique shop, number seventeen? We've got that pull out sofa. Top bell."

"Maybe I have a ride. Vinnie, are you headed near Charles Street?"

"What city might that be, senorita?"

Vinnie's gazing past his scooter at the empty air, flying on something, not familiar with Boston, though that's where he lives. Leah's survived one crazed voyage and isn't risking another.

"Jill, I'll take the T", and gives Vinnie a quick wave.

Attorney Linda Markovitz scans the documents, takes off her red framed glasses and says, "Annulment's not an option, though the marriage was brief."

Leah's frustrated that she can't cancel Sam in one magic pouf.

"It's your choice whether to go forward or not," says Linda, tapping the corner of the retainer check with her manicured peach nails. "I can return this right now."

"No, keep it. I want a divorce."

Unsure where to live, Leah has applied for a resident associate position at Cranhurst College. Eric's comment-- "Well, you get a free apartment, but the price is no peace, students knocking day and night, loud music, yelling, arguing, drunk kids vomiting in the halls. Trust me, I've done it."

"If they make me an offer, I'll decide." The only thing Leah's clear about is divorcing Sam. No one's telling her what to do or where to live, not Eric, not her mother in New York, who, when they talk, is as upset about the break up as she was about the elopement, though she immediately put a sizable check in Leah's account.

"So many impulsive actions, dear, not that I'm judging," though of course Leah felt that's precisely what she was doing. "I thought Sam wasn't right for you, maybe a provider, but who has a crystal ball?"

Leah washes the dishes Jill's piled up in the sink. "Sam doesn't know about Eric, and I want to keep it that way. I wonder if he'd hire someone to follow me."

"That's imagination overload, Leah. It's a no fault state, so who gives a damn?"

"I'll be a wreck until it's over, can't sit still. I need to take a walk. Want to come?"

"No thanks." Jill's refilling her glass of Merlot as Leah heads down Charles Street, looking over her shoulder, wondering who might be hiding in a doorway.

But it's Eric who spots into Sam in the lobby of The Clarion Suites Hotel during a break from his Philosophy of History Seminar. Sam's wearing a gray suit, not the khakis and camping vest in Leah's photo, but it's him, with an elegantly dressed, pretty, black woman. They head to the bar, and Eric asks the clerk if that's Mr. Sam Weitz. "We don't provide information about guests," says the bespectacled man, scowling down at some paperwork, but when Eric points to his History Seminar ID tag, he gets a nod. "Mr. and Mrs. Weitz."



"Thanks," said Eric, and calls Leah, pleased that he snapped pictures with his phone.

"What?" Leah said, listening. "Is her name Clarisse?"

"Don't know that, but they're in the hotel bar right now."

"And the bastard's dragging his feet about the divorce."

"They could be talking, saying good bye?"

"I'm supposed to believe that? I'm calling my lawyer."

Linda takes copies of the photos and does some research. "This should do it, at least for now. I'm guessing that Sam wanted to keep his parents' good will and had an idea they'd be upset about Clarisse, however well educated and chic. It's possible she broke up with him because she's got too much self respect to stay in a closet."

"But he's got a good job at a top firm."

"There may be inheritance questions and complications with family and business relationships. Maybe he thought his future would be easier with someone white and Jewish. That's my take on it."

Leah sits in her chair, steaming, knowing that with his family, it's very likely.

"Now do I get an annulment?"

"No, but this should speed things up," says Linda. "I'll draft a letter to his attorney with a copy of one or two photos. They'll accept or make a counter offer to keep things 'private'."

Leah tours the cramped, resident associate's suite at Cranhurst, unsure whether she'll be offered a position, or whether she wants it, but not ready to jump into living with Eric. She arranges to borrow Jill's car to get away for a weekend.

"You need a break?" Eric asks, his glasses tilted on his nose, mended with gray duct tape.

"I need to be sure of what I'm doing with no pressure from anyone. I've made enough mistakes, nearly ruined my life. I don't suppose you forgive me?"

"Forgive? What about you forgiving me? Enough moralistic crap. We both made mistakes, wrong assumptions, and there's nothing to forgive, so let's get past it."

Eric wants her in bed, but knows better than to rush. "You've been through a lot."

She gets up from her chair and sits next to him on the couch. "It's me," he says. "I waited for you, and I'll keep waiting as long as you like." He strokes her palm lightly with his index finger. She slides her hand under his t-shirt and feels the frill of hair on his chest. He touches her back but lets her make the next move. Then he sets his taped glasses on the table, and hours pass, sweetly, in bed.

Two days later Leah drives Jill's car to The Barnacle in Marblehead, a small place decorated with model sailboats and starfish. A friend of Jill's mother owns the inn, and in exchange for a freebie weekend, Leah will write a review in her 'Voices' column, easy to do because the place is comfortable and charming. She walks to Fort Sewall and around the harbor, begins to read a novel, wanders through antique shops and artists' exhibitions, samples restaurants, breathes salt air, writes in her journal, makes notes for the review, does nothing for hours on end, sleeps. The inn is perfect because she doesn't want to talk to anyone or do anything but soak up the mild, sunny days by the sea with absolutely no fog. Back in Cambridge she reads the draft from Sam's attorney.

"He wants to wrap this up," says Linda. "The offer's decent, could be bigger, but you get to keep those nice rings. And please don't toss them in the river. Sell them or save them, and if you must throw something away, make it crumbs for the fish."

After signing papers in court, Leah meets Jill on a bridge over the Charles. "There's got to be a better divorce ceremony than this," Jill says, watching Leah throwing crusts of French bread from a crumpled plastic bag.

"You do your own thing," says Leah. "At least you had the sense to stay single."

Jill takes a silver ring out of her purse and tosses it. "That's the first thing Trevor gave me." She stares at the blank surface of the water. "A floral design I pretended to like because I wanted him so much."



"I've done things like that." Leah shakes her head wondering why faking ever seemed a good idea.

"We're attending an encounter weekend in exchange for his doing six months of anger therapy, though I dread going. Don't look at me like that! His intensity used to be a turn on. He resented growing up poor, not knowing which fork to use at formal meals."

"Who in hell grows up knowing banquet etiquette? The queen of England? I remember a fancy dinner, baffled by a whole artichoke on a gold-edged plate," Leah grins, "no idea what to do, but I watched and copied."

"Trevor gets frustrated, like he's forced to take a test he couldn't study for."

"Well, grow up, Trevor," Leah says throwing the last crumbs into the water. "By the way when we signed papers Sam said he was having a farewell drink with Clarisse before she moves to California, which I don't believe. He now admits he knew the fog was serious, but didn't want to 'lose the game and look like a quitter in my eyes.' Ha."

"I've got to hand it to him! Consistent liar playing every angle." says Jill.

"The divorce is a relief, but when do I get over the anger at myself for marrying him in the first place?"

"Some day, maybe, but it's got to be easier for you with Eric back. No one's holding my hand, and I don't want to camp out with my mom forever." Leah stops walking.

"How can you say it's 'easier' for me? I was so miserable thinking I'd lost Eric that I jumped into an idiotic elopement, got lost in fog, was rescued by a mackerel fisherman, how classy is that? Plus the legal mess? Eric's good, more than good, but we have plenty to work out. For now I'm subletting a studio in North Cambridge." Leah starts walking again.

I didn't mean to brush off what you went through."

"And as long as we're bringing things up, you're drinking too much, Jill, and that encounter weekend sounds horrible. Why put yourself through it?"

"Please don't lecture me. My father was an alcoholic, and my mother drops hints all the time. I still have feelings for Trevor, however hopeless it is. I need to give it one more chance."

"He is a hunk, gorgeous," says Leah.

"Did you ever love Sam?"

"Can't pronounce the word love about Sam," says Leah, "and I don't think he loved me either. We used each other to get past Clarisse and Eric, though the words sound pathetic."

At the Mango Cafe, Eric announces his full-time faculty appointment at Brandeis and Leah admits she's gotten a 'no' from Cranhurst. "They like me, but have no budget for fall term, though maybe in the spring. So I've taken the sublet."

"Okay for now, but I've got a new toy to get to Waltham," Eric says, tilting his head toward a small red car across the street. "A few dents but only five years old."

Leah says, "A car?" Before she follows Eric outside, she hugs Jill and says, "You don't have to go, you know. You can say no."

Jill finishes her latte, glancing at the Encounter Garden pamphlet, 'We meet at a verdant estate with a crystal lake.' "Ick," she says, but at four p.m. Friday she parks her car at the white Victorian in the Berkshires and joins the people sitting in a circle of chairs on the fieldstone patio. Trevor, in black jeans and a blue button down shirt, is studying his scuffed sneakers, avoiding her eyes. "I'm Tina Morgan," says the woman with stylishly clipped dark hair. "I'm Eduardo Rivera," says the balding man with a broad mustache and wide black-rimmed glasses, "and we're co-therapists. People meet in first bloom, as in a garden, but over time weeds appear, and the connection's damaged or lost. Is there a way to pull the weeds and rebalance?" His intense brown eyes scan the group.

Jill wants to leave but decides to go to her assigned groups all day Saturday, filling out questionnaires, role playing, hearing various people's stories and learning 'rules of respectful communication.' They chart their relationships and list 'weeds' --areas of unresolved conflict. To prevent distraction, cell phones are in the hotel safe until the closing 'candle of positive



change' ceremony. Sunday morning Leah and Trevor meet as scheduled "to explore paths of communication and reconciliation." They've been in numerous groups during the weekend, some together, some separately, and he looks like a high school truant who's been dragged to the principal's office.

"Walk by the lake?" Trevor says, his hands in his pockets and a stiff edge in his voice. His eyes are bloodshot enough for Jill to suspect he's got alcohol or some drug.

"We're supposed to discuss positive communication patterns," says Jill.

"Stick to the rules, goody goody? What a bucket of bullshit."

"You chose this," Leah says, crossing her arms.

"So?"

"We're supposed to listen and not judge." To avoid the hardness of his eyes, Jill shifts her gaze to the ripples on the lake surface, gray in the morning light, reflecting wispy clouds.

"Yeah, that's what they're selling, but I'm a lawyer, and I know how people lie. The group leaders mouth clichés and rake in the cash. You don't like how I do things, period, end report, I rest my case."

Jill checks her watch. Ten minutes have gone by, and she's sinking fast. "You're judging, and I'm not your client. You agreed to six months of anger therapy if I attended this weekend."

"So I did, but let's get real. How about a ride in that green canoe over there?"

"You mean you won't do therapy? Now you're into canoes? And if you think the program's bogus, why did you push me to come?"

"How was I supposed to know what brand of shit they were hustling? I figured you'd eat up the psycho-babble, and looks like you did." He walks to the dock and steps into the green canoe as if balancing on jello.

"Trevor?" she says.

He gives her a cutting glance that labels her the enemy, then starts to rock the canoe, shifting his weight back and forth, once, twice, three times, pushing deeper each time until the canoe flips.

Two supervisors drop their clipboards and run as Trevor pops up by the canoe, spitting water. The men-- one plump and red headed, the other tall and full-bearded-- rush to the dock. "Need assistance, sir?"

"I'm fine," Trevor shouts. "It's the most fun I've had all weekend."

"You can't create a disturbance," says tall beard as red head gawks.

Trevor pulls himself onto the dock, water streaming, his nose starting to bleed. He tosses his soaked jacket aside, kicks off his sneakers, then gets into the canoe, more centered this time. He shifts from one foot to the other. How far can he rock before it flips? Jill, ready to vomit, turns away as tall beard presses a button on his phone.

She makes it to her bathroom, throws up, washes her face, then lies back on the bed until the "candle of positive change" ceremony. Tina's speech is brief, wishing everyone "strength to grow and change," and Eduardo returns cell phones. Trevor's there, in a dry white shirt and gray slacks, chatting with a small brunette he must have met over the weekend. Driving back to the city she thinks, 'He's ready for someone else, maybe not that one, but that's his way to show me we're done.'

It's nearly nine when Jill's mother Elise arrives, her flight delayed by a thunder storm in Chicago. "How are you doing," Jill asks, hugging her.

"I'll miss Margie every day, but I'm grateful for the years we had." Elise puts her black jacket and gray silk scarf in the closet, noting her daughter's sad eyes, wrinkled white t-shirt, red plaid pajama bottoms, hair down, not stylish or pulled together as she normally would be.

"By the way, the Merlot, Chardonnay and Cabernet need restocking," Jill says.

"That's a lot, dear," she says, noting the wine rack's row of zeros.



Jill sinks back on the couch in tears. The big wave's breaking, and she's not ready. "The encounter weekend was a fiasco."

"I'm sorry, though not surprised, after everything that's happened. At least you don't have to hire a lawyer like Leah. How about tea?" she says. Elise will look for a way to approach the subjects of alcohol and therapy, but not tonight--too exhausted.

"I'll put on the kettle," says Jill, heading to the kitchen.

"I'd like Darjeeling, but there's Jasmine and English Breakfast and I'm not sure what else." Elise sits down and shuts her eyes, overwhelmed by the long flight and days of sorrow.

Jill finds boxes of tea in the cupboard, and a lavender cup with Happy Birthday in swirly silver letters. Her twelfth birthday--balloons floating in the dining room when the police rang the doorbell. A stranger in a pick up truck died at the scene of the accident, and her drunk father, flung from his van, two intensive care days later. The awful funeral, the horrible black dresses she and her mother wore. The red kettle jiggles to a boil, puffing steam with a piercing whistle, and it's time to shut off the flame. Jill stares into the plume of moisture, thinking of Leah and the hundred year fog, envying her decisiveness, her energy, once she made up her mind.

"The kettle?" her mother calls.

Jill's staring at the steam cloud, hypnotized by a harmless bit of nothing in her mother's kitchen, so easy to shut it off, drop tea bags into mugs and pour boiling water. If only it could be that simple to let Trevor go, cut off feelings, just turn the knob.



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SWEET CAROLINA BBQ



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Disaster Preparedness

by Jenifer K. Ward

I scan my soul for the door jamb,
the heavy table,
the shelter from the coming earthquake of grief.

I run in my mind's eye to the storm cellar,
kicking at the door with my sturdy Dorothy shoe
as the twister approaches.

I hoard mental water for the thirst
that is already starting to parch my throat.

My father, meanwhile, journeys away, mouthing words silently and then aloud,
eyes open-shut-fluttering.

The tubes in his nose bob as he asks, faintly, how many fish I caught,
how far it is to the Desert City of Petra.

--Little Rock, Arkansas, Thanksgiving Day 2012



White After Memorial Day

by Karen Paul Holmes

It's only April 10th, yet I've shimmied
into optic white jeans, rejoicing
that they fit from last summer; white
doesn't forgive. Boiling
for broth on the stove: the chaff
of last night's chicken
thyme rubbed into its olive-oiled skin
for my dinner party
where a true Belle told me, *In the South, you go
by temperature not date.*
In Michigan this wouldn't happen
and even here, I don't wear white shoes
until June first. I just won't.
An Augusta gentleman, 82, with young man's glasses
asks me to coffee. He has heard of my divorce.
I refuse, politely. His wife died three years ago.
Twin Cadillacs, circa 1980, sit in his carport
side by side, limo-long and white.



Rant for A Husband's Birthday

by Patricia L. Johnson

Finicky and fussy and changed his mind again. Yellow cake, and chocolate frosting. And make sure to serve it with vanilla ice cream. I am nonplused. Of course he can change his mind, but at our wedding nine months ago the cake and ice cream flavors clashed because he insisted never use vanilla ice cream. So we had his favorite flavor, chocolate mint chip. Not small chips of mint, but rectangular slugs of chocolate so loaded with paraffin and waxes that it will not melt down through the holes in my stainless steel sink's drain strainer; even when I use the hottest water. He has forgotten that he told me never vanilla, and now for his birthday celebration he says only vanilla ice cream for his cake. Saucy. He is perturbed whenever we grill fish because we grill two separate kinds. I like halibut, he prefers swordfish. They are not even close, different in texture, oceans apart in flavor. Swordfish a blanched steak in need of sauces; halibut a delicate meat of the Atlantic best served with butter. And that rotation trick halibuts do with their eyes when they are young - their left eye moves over the top of the head until it is completely relocated beside the right eye. What a trick. To morph from elongated like an angelfish, to flat horizontally like a stingray. From innocent-eye to a predator's gaze. Halibuts bottom feed or rise in the waters in pursuit of different fare. A metamorphic miracle. I say more power to them. We have to eat to survive. Two if by sea. And don't forget the cake. Predilections are followed by new pleasures - chocolate mint or vanilla or any flavor preferred. No more Jack Sprat differences. It's your birthday dear hubby, enjoy.



I Take Pasta Salad to the Crawfish Boil

by Patricia L. Johnson

As soon as my daughter-in-law spread newspapers
five-pages thick upon two picnic tables,
I wonder if her yes was in jest about my offer to bring
pasta salad to her crawfish boil - oozing olive oil and
overripe tomatoes. It must have been politeness when she said
go ahead and bring it; for there are no forks. All the beer's
in bottles, paper towels stand in for napkins,
beside heavy paper plates. 160 pounds of fresh crawfish
purged in salt water, cooked and poured onto the headlines,
sports, and want-ads of the local paper -
and off to the end of the crustacean mountain,
red-skinned potatoes and corn on the cob.
All lemon-water-boiled with cayenne pepper
to suit Louisianans' tastes.

Everyone crowds the tables and takes all they want;
pick and pluck with fingers until abdomens and pinchers
release the sweet meat; the bravest Cajuns suck
the good out of the head then devour the rest of the
their beloved mudbugs. Now is the time to try some
or go without. I eat three; careful to leave the heads
and their contents intact.

At the end of the boil the women sit together, digest lunch
and the latest news. Chitinous shells lie in a mound
on soggy newspaper. My pasta sits in the fridge.
The guests begin to leave, I divide
the untouched salad for them to take home.
A woman places her hand on my shoulder and inquires,
"you mean you eat this macaroni cold?"



Reflection

by Maryann Corbett

Kitchen curtains part: a stage-set morning.
Hung with a fog scrim
spun from the ground's heavy breathing,
the world's gone Grimm:

Hidden, the rude devices
(clotheslines, trash bins, garden tools)
that label life an interlude of prop arrangers.
Mechanicals.

Foregrounded, all that glitters.
Autumn and watery air refract the light before us:
maples in court costume, their mill and murmur
an opera chorus—

Unsolid. Such is matter.
The light-play deliquesces in a blink.
Yet even the dishwater
unfrothing now behind us in the sink

has curlicued these vapors
in foggy likeness, threading light-diffusions,
the plainest facts conspiring to be shapers
of glorious illusions.



Ode to Oysters

by Megan Roberts

With butter
is the best, but what isn't?
Or with nose-opening
horseradish, a little dollop
on top of their rounded backs.

Saltine crunch, butter
and cocktail, layered and slathered
together, a drop of Texas Pete,
an apostrophe of horseradish,
and smash it all with an O
of jalapeno.

Oh oysters, I can eat enough
to make men uncomfortable;
Their eyebrows rise as I order,
A peck, rare.

I like the ones bigger
than a fat man's
thumb, the ones
other people pass on.

And I am tempted
to use the word slurp
here, but slurp doesn't
do the trick. The drinking of an oyster
is more like the way water
swallows a ship, the earth
takes in a body, or the way
a baby puts its mouth
around her mother's skin.

Imagine: within an old, scratched pan,
trailing the oyster on your fork
through simmering butter,
like a fish dragging
on a line in thick water.



Best Biscuits in Town

by Sheryl Cornett

At first I denied it. How could I be *homesick*? But this past summer while on a two week writing-in-solitude sojourn in New York City, I got a keen craving for biscuits that turned out to be a manifestation of good old fashioned homesickness.

I guard such writing times jealously—time to immerse in a project with out the competing needs of my big family and teaching overload. Never had I been homesick before, though I have had plenty of times of wanting a writing residency to last a little longer. Then again, never had I gone off to write in NYC with a brand new husband back home in North Carolina. I missed him terribly.

I needed a biscuit – slathered in sweet butter and the peach jam I'd made and brought with me. That would stay me, yea, comfort me. But this was July in an un-air-conditioned sixth floor apartment in Manhattan. Nobody in her right mind could imagine the hot and light, hand-rolled darlings issuing forth from the oven, in this case a delightful vintage 1950s white enamel Cookmaster.

O come on, Mom, make yourself some biscuits. At least to say you did it in that urban funky kitchen, in that cute stove. You'd do it if we were there, my daughter said to me by phone.

No way, I reply. *It's in the upper nineties, one hundred percent humidity.*

My daughter won't back off. But biscuits are the taste of home, she says, and can take you there for a minute or two. *Give you a needed shot in the arm. You taught us that.*

Go on. I still hear her words after hanging up the phone. Make some.

But, hey—it dawns on me—this is Manhattan, where you can buy anything at any time. Let someone else suffer the heat of an oven at 425 degrees. Since it's still early and relatively cooler than it will be by noon, I pull on running shorts and a tank top and run fifteen blocks north to Fairway Market, a huge place (by urban standards) with everything from caviar to Krispy Kremes. But no decent biscuits.

So, I jog south and stop at every mom-and-pop bakery till I reach Zabar's on 80th Street. I linger long at the Silver Moon Bakery on 105th, and almost give in to a baguette filled with mozzarella slabs nestled in fresh basil leaves and plum tomatoes. The challah, bran muffins, whole wheat croissants, and focaccio also capture my attention – glistening warmly, their collective scent blends sweet and savory. But I keep going, I'm on a mission for the real thing –a piece of down home-bread, the staff of life, a visceral reminder that fits in the palm of your hand. A reminder of how the simple pleasures bring us together.

In this city of everything-available twenty-four/seven, I'm absolutely convinced there's a biscuit to be had. I even stop at a Hot & Crusty, one of the few chain bakeries New Yorkers don't complain about. There are rolls and cookies and cakes, but no baker's oven heated to 425, no one throwing in a batch of this home-bread. Amidst all the extravagant offerings in these bakeries and markets, there's not a biscuit in sight. The closest I come are scones, and these are sometimes day-old even in the best bakeries (and older than that at Starbucks, where there are no ovens in sight because they've traveled to us frozen, from some factory across the country). The only thing for this disappointment is to respond *When in Rome* and pick up some Casinelli's hand-made spinach ravioli, coming to you fresh frozen: 5.99 lb and the best you've ever had.

This pasta, drizzled in heavy cream, eaten warm but not too hot, at my laptop in the apartment dining room, was a lovely deterrent. By now it is the late lunch hour. I forget my craving, the heat, and go back to the writing. Fueled for progress, I type valiantly away. How much time passes? I find myself staring out the windows at the day-campers on the playground of St. Hilda's School, missing my children, pining away for my bridegroom. I'm down from the pasta-high; it's worse than crashing from a caffeine mountain-top. I go running again in Riverside Park: this helps.

It's a hot dusk: exhausted air sticks to me and smells of fish-and-boat-diesel fumes off the Hudson River. Since this is the least hot it's been all day, the park is full of people: an old man reading the paper with a pen light, parents pushing empty strollers as a toddler walks off his air-conditioned cabin fever. Preschoolers play in the water fountain park at 97th Street. I run along the river-promenade where the air moves a little, chanting prayers for the family and the psalm of the day's prosper the work of our hands. I try not to stare jealously at a couple on the grassy banks picnicking with white wine and take-out Thai. I go over in my mind what I might report about this day of writing. I feel I owe it to those I love back in North Carolina to burn the midnight oil.



I arrive at the 79th Street boat basin, where there is a café patio-balcony lit up with white Christmas-y lights. A jazz trio plays a Ben Webster tune and the sexy smell of grilled steaks makes me crazy for my true love. It is really, totally city-dark now. I sit on the balcony half-wall, watching the night river and inhaling the smell of grilled garlic-y meats and, probably, egg-plants, onions, peppers in some kind of balsamic vinegar marinade (judging by the tang-in-the-air) mixed with mesquite smoke. Then I walk back up Broadway to my nest on 114th Street and Riverside.

I'm coming through the door when I get the landline call from home.

How's it going? asks my new husband, but I turn the questioning back on him. After all, am I to report how long it took me to rewrite one page? Do I tell him about watching the day-campers at St. Hilda's? About my search the length of Broadway for *biscuits*?

I get the news of little league, dance team, sports-and-art day camp, the men's tennis ladder update, the (expensive) word from the plumber, the cool front coming through. Then he turns the talk back to me.

So how's it all going up there? You getting done what you need and want to?

The moment of truth. *Yeah, sure. I've expanded that part where the main character bolts from Paris on the last train to Cluny—*

Good, good, he encourages.

But, I continue, it's hot! So hot. Worse than a heat wave at home because there's no AC. Hard to concentrate.

Well, you know how to stick it out. Anything you need?

There's a pause. Static on the line.

I want to come home. There, I said it. I know what he's thinking now: After all the arranging for the family that it took to get her there, she wants to come home.

But he says: *You're kidding?*

Yes, I am actually. Though not entirely. Is this the comfort to him that I intend it to be?

Silence.

I'm homesick. I can't believe this, I say. Am I whining? *It is a strange feeling.* Then I tell him about the bakeries up and down Broadway, the pining for everyone at home.

Well. I'll be there to meet you in a few days. If you haven't found any biscuits by then, I'll make you some.

Thank you. The only biscuit specimens this man has ever produced until recently (he's beginning to improve) were dusty, rock hard, and like unto cardboard. *Anyway, just because I feel this way doesn't mean I'm not working. I'm actually sort of pleased with the new material—*

I know you're working hard. Try not to miss me and the kids so it won't be even harder.

But it's good for me to miss y'all.

It is?

I guess it's the distance. And enough detachment to realize riches not-as-the-world-gives and all that. Do you realize how many biscuits, scones, muffins, baguettes come out of our oven?

I guess that does suggest something's going on around the table at least. Or that we're all fixing to gain weight—hardly in vogue, are we, in this day of South Beach?

As I am about to gush how bolstered I feel by this talk, how challenged I am to harness the energy of these longings for my family, the power snaps off the lights and my husband's voice is suddenly gone. Darkness startles me with its still density. This heat has forced folks to run too many fans and AC units. I am left in the humid dimness, except for the glow of the laptop screen saver, running on battery.

This apartment has candles everywhere, including a three-foot-tall candelabra whose individual holders are full of fat stubby burned down clumps of wax-with-wicks. I light these and see my way to the kitchen for more candles. In there, a flicker catches my eye. The pilot light on the stove! An oven that's not electric—

I set about with bowl, flour, butter in the candle light. As I work the mixture with my hands I chant again prayers for the family and the psalm for the day: *prosper the work of our hands*. When the biscuits come out of the oven I'm still singing it. For the moment I'm home, somehow, with Jim and the kids at the oak table (his grandmother Liza's) and the fleshy bread we share is food indeed. I'm thinking—here in a New York City heat wave plus power outage—as I spread peach jam on the tender inside tufts of the split round, what a grace-gift to have people you love enough to miss. To have those you make and break bread for and with.



Recipe for Biscuits Made by Candle Light (without electricity).

Best Biscuits #1

2 cups self rising flour (Southern Biscuit Flour if possible) plus a little for needing.

1 additional teaspoon baking powder, $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon sea salt

1 stick butter

~ $\frac{3}{4}$ cup buttermilk

Best Biscuits #2 (For When You Have Electricity).

2 cups self rising flour

1 additional teaspoon baking powder, 1 teaspoon sea salt

1 stick butter

~ $\frac{3}{4}$ cup $\frac{1}{2}$ & $\frac{1}{2}$ or heavy cream

Into the bowl of a food processor put the flour and butter and pulse to combine. The combo should look like bread crumbs; all at once add the buttermilk or cream and pulse 2-4 times (depending on your machine) until ingredients are just wet, but no trace of dry flour can be seen. Turn out onto a lightly dusted-with-flour cutting board and pat into a circle. Cut w/ biscuit cutters or a very sharp serrated knife into wedges and, using a spatula, slide them onto ungreased cookie sheet. Bake in a 425 preheated oven for 9-11 minutes or until just golden on top.

When the butter and flour are being processed, one can add: fresh herbs (one-quarter of a cup snipped chives and parsley are a good combo) to taste or a cup (eight ounces) grated Parmesan or cheddar cheese. Once you start adding (at least a $\frac{1}{4}$ cup) sugar nuts, raisins, chocolate chips, dried sour cherries, etc, then you have SCONES: a British cousin, the usually sweet version of biscuits, though these days savory scones are also popular, too.



Night Business

by Sally Banks Zakariya

What I remember of that night was your shirt, that
white lace shirt stretched taut over your dark skin
like those crocheted mats they used to put on tables,
an innocent sort of look, pale pattern
against dark wood.

All I saw of the gun was its cold round mouth,
so small to hold a lethal dose. You looked
me in the eye, a steady gaze, businesslike.
Look all you want, you said. You knew I couldn't
pick you from the others in the policeman's book.
You knew I'd give you everything I had,
even the opal ring.

Key in hand, right at my door, I looked hard at
your face. A simple transaction, I thought, no
rough stuff, no real harm, though you could have
unlocked the door and taken anything and I would
not have said no.

It was only after, when you were gone and I was
safe inside, that I thought about the gun and
my heart beat in my throat. I will remember
your face, I thought, but what I remember
was your shirt, only your shirt, how I wanted
to reach out and touch it, touch the lace
that said one thing while your gun
said another.



Rotten Apples

by Janie Dempsey Watts

From Sarah's perch at the top of the stairs, it sounded like Mama wanted to kill Daddy. Sarah, an uneasy 16, stood on the top step eavesdropping on her parents' pre-breakfast fight. Her older sister, Ashley, home from college for the summer, sat on the stair next to Sarah, painting her finger nails with fuchsia polish. "I stayed awake till after midnight and you still didn't come home," Mama yelled. "J.D., you can't tell me you were working that long!"

"I was putting up stock," Sarah's Daddy yelled back. "We got in a late shipment." Ashley leaned over to whisper in Sarah's ear.

"J.D.'s lying," Ashley whispered. Since she had left home for college, she had started calling their daddy "J.D." "He wouldn't give those kind of details if he was telling the truth," she said. She plunged the brush back into the bottle of nail polish as she spoke. "You can't trust anyone who would throw wormy apples into a grinder."

"What are you talking about?"

"J.D., your daddy. I saw a fat worm hanging out of the apple and he threw it right in." Ashley held up the nail polish brush. "That worm was longer than this!"

"I don't believe you," said Sarah.

"Suit yourself," said Ashley. She wiggled the brush in a serpentine fashion, inserted it back into the polish bottle. "They put worms in tequila."

Looking at the brush, Sarah tried to remember the day last summer when the family gathered at their grandmother's farm to make homemade apple cider. Sarah had not seen any worm and she didn't believe her sister. Their father would not throw a worm in the grinder to make the mash which he would then press into cider for their family to drink. She also was sure he had not done this because her job had been to hand him the freshly washed apples. Twice when she accidentally handed him half-rotten apples, he had handed them back.

"Throw these across the fence for the cows," he said. "They'll eat anything." She carried the partly rotten apples over to the fence where a small herd of cows grazed. Except for a couple of times when she left her father's side to throw the bad apples to the cows, she had stood beside her daddy the whole day, pulping and pressing the juicy apples. Even when the yellow jackets swarmed around the mash and with fear prickling her to move away, Sarah had stood close to her father, faithfully handing him the fruit. And where had her sister been during the heat and yellow jackets?

Afraid of getting stung, Ashley had retreated to the utility sink on the back porch to wash out the plastic jugs to hold the sweet and golden juice. How could Ashley say that their father had thrown in a wormy apple when she had not even been there the entire time? Could her father, in the few minutes Sarah had gone to feed the cows, actually have thrown a wormy apple into the press? Was Ashley making up this up to appear smarter, wiser? Could their father actually be having an affair?

All she knew for sure was that this summer there would be no cider making. Grandma's apple tree had not borne any fruit. Bitter words had replaced last summer's sugary cider.

From below, Daddy's angry voice boomed up the stairwell.

"Work? What would you know about work?" Daddy yelled. "All you do is sit here on your rumpus."

"Rumpus, my foot! I am working to keep your clothes clean, the meals made and the house picked up. I press your shirts. I write out the bills."

"I'm going to work!" Daddy yelled. The screen door slammed shut after him.

"I'm dead bolting the door at eleven," Mama called after him. "Why don't you tell the whore that?" As soon as the coast was clear, Ashley retreated to the walk-in closet in search of the right sandals. Sarah bolted downstairs to check on their mother. She found her standing at the sink watching Daddy back out his new silver sedan. Mama's delicate fingers clutched the countertop edge. On this sticky morning, the cool ivory tiles appeared to be the only thing Mama could hold on to.



"Mama?" Sarah said.

Mama turned her face toward Sarah. Through the foggy haze of her eyeglasses, Sarah saw her mother's eyes dampened by tears.

"I'll be alright, honey," she said. "But your father won't if I can prove he's seeing her." The her Mama referred to was her father's book keeper who helped him balance the books at his store, and "a whole lot more" according to dirty-minded Ashley. Sarah remembered the conversation from a few weeks earlier.

"Charles and I saw Daddy and Stella coming out of the Read House Hotel," Ashley had reported. "His arm was wrapped around her shoulder." Sarah had been quick to defend her father.

"They were having coffee. Or dinner. There's a restaurant there in the hotel."

"How would you know?" asked Ashley.

"I saw it from the bus window on the way home from school," Sarah replied. "Maybe they ate dinner and talked about work stuff. Why do you always think the worst?"

"You are so naïve," Ashley replied, drawing out the last syllable to emphasize the "eve" part. "Why would he have his arm around her?"

"She was cold?" she said.

"It was at least eighty that day," Ashley responded.

"Honey?" said Mama, bringing Sarah's attention back to the warm kitchen. "Aren't you supposed to babysit this morning? Go ahead and get dressed. I'll be fine." Sarah nodded and turned to go back upstairs.

Ashley was slipping her fuchsia toes into a pair of strappy white sandals.

"What kind of proof do you need, baby sister?"

"I don't know," Sarah answered. "A picture?" Ashley tapped her knuckles lightly against Sarah's head.

"Now you're thinking, *ma petite enfant*. Charles and I will take a picture and you'll see I'm right." She grabbed the handle of her white purse and pulled the strap across her shoulder. "Speaking of Charles, he's picking me up, taking me out in his brother's boat."

"Wait," said Sarah. "I don't think that's a good idea." Ashley stopped and faced her sister.

"I know how to swim," she said. "And his brother is driving the boat."

"No," said Sarah. "I mean the picture. Daddy might see you and Charles taking the picture and get mad."

"We'll do it at night, silly," said Ashley. "With a flash or something. Daddy will be so blinded by the light, he won't be able to see anything for a minute. Then we can run away."

"That's mean," said Sarah.

"Seeing another woman behind Mama's back is mean," she retorted. With a flip of her chestnut hair, Ashley headed down the stairs before Sarah could think of anything else to say, which was probably a good thing. Her comments had already complicated things, as they often did. Sometimes words just swarmed out of her mouth and took on a life of their own. She could see the words rising up, a collection of nouns, verbs, and adjectives, unruly words aiming to get her in trouble.

Maybe this time they wouldn't. A photo would prove what she knew. Her father was not a cheater. She would see for herself when she went along with Charles and Ashley to take that picture. Sarah rushed to slip on a tee-shirt and jeans so she could catch up with her sister.

Ashley was standing under the Mimosa tree, fully bloomed in pink feathery flowers. Her shoulders were thrown back, her face full of controlled expectation as she waited for her date. Like a neighbor's pink lawn ornament, Sarah thought.

"Flamingo," Sarah said. Ashley's head whipped around in annoyance. She tried to wave Sarah away.

"What? Go back inside. I don't want you lurking around—"

"I'll go with you."

"You will not!" Ashley snapped. "Are you crazy?"

"When you take the pictures. I want to be there." The sound of a roaring engine made both sisters turn their heads toward the street.

"Yes, fine, whatever," said Ashley. "Just get the hell out of here, now!" She waved her hands again, and Sarah jogged across the lawn back to the house. She ducked behind the privet hedge and watched as Ashley waited for Charles to climb out of his loud, tiny red sports car and open the door for her. From her hidden place, she could see and hear everything but not be seen. The sports car flew away but she remained hidden in the bushes, observing her yard as a stranger might. The grass needed mowing. Some dandelions had grown downy, flyaway tops. She heard the droning of a June bug and remembered the time last



summer when her father had run over a nest of bees.

Near the base of the maple tree, she saw the spot in the lawn. Startled from their home in the ground, the swarm had attacked him all at once, leaving his bare arms, neck and face covered with stings. He had run inside to Mama. She handed him a cold beer, dabbed each and every red welt with alcohol, carefully applied a baking soda mixture to draw out the poison. How could he cheat on a wife who treated him so tenderly?

She inhaled the sweet scent of the white hedge blossoms and thought of Corey, a year older and her neighbor. Last week, they had listened to Beatles music at his house. On the way to her front door, he had pulled her into the shadows cast by these very privet hedges. He teased his hand up under her tee shirt and cupped her breast, probed her mouth with his tongue. She liked what was going in her mouth, but almost swatted his hand away from her breast—until he squeezed her nipple. He fumbled with the clasp on her bra until the slam of a door inside the house caused her to pull away. She knew Mama would not approve of Corey's exploration of her youngest daughter's body. Tonight they would rendezvous again at the deserted and dark pocket park two streets over. She hoped they would lie under the hedges behind the swings. She wondered if his hands would journey to her southern hemisphere, as he called it. Walking to the park that night, she told him about the plan to take pictures of her father.

"I can go with you," he said.

"Really?" she asked.

"Sure," he said. He puffed out his chest. "You may need to have another man around in case something happens."

"Like what?" Sarah shivered as she asked the question.

"I don't know, I'm not sure. I'll protect you," Corey said. He squeezed her hand as he spoke. She felt safe, loved.

At the park, after they flew down the slide, he led her to the place behind the swings, a shadowy grassy area. He pulled her down beside him and kissed her like he had the night before. She waited for his hand to cup her breast but felt instead his fingers tickling under the hem of her loose, knit shorts. Her body softened to him, and she warmed to his tentative explorations of her southern hemisphere.

Between kisses he whispered.

"I won't hurt you," he said. "Tell me when you want me to stop." She did not. She liked the way she felt, like she was falling backwards into another world. She found herself not only yielding to his movements, but moving towards them. From somewhere far away, she thought she heard a zipping noise. He grabbed her hand and pushed it against his solid nakedness. So smooth, so firm. All at once he was pushing the hard thing against her flimsy panties. Like a worm entering an apple. She clasped her thighs together and pushed his chest away. He pulled back.

She steered his hands back to her breasts, but the mood had been broken. She sensed he was angry. .

"I don't like that," she said. "Can't we just do the other?"

"Sure," his voice still raspy and hot. "You're not ready—yet."

She had heard about the delicate balance between giving in and staying a technical virgin, or as the girls at school had called it, a T.V. If you gave in you could get catch diseases, or get pregnant. If you didn't give in, the guy might move on to some other girl. What the other girls had not told her is how good the part before felt. Sarah did not want to lose Corey to some other girl who was willing, nor sour what they had. She had heard there were other ways to please a boy. Maybe she would find out what he wanted. She hoped she could keep him interested but not actually do "it" till she left for college. She didn't want to risk getting caught. Her mother would be so disappointed in her, and her father would probably shoot her—or Corey.

The next evening found them at the pocket park but not alone. Charles and Ashley sat in swings outlining the plan for the photo shoot. Corey and Sarah stood in the sand in front of them, listening. Ashley said she and Charles had googled the whore's--Stella's-- address. Figuring that J.D. would not be so dumb as to carry on his affair at his store, the plan was to hide outside Stella's apartment for several nights and see if they could catch their father in a "moment de passion" as Ashley called it.

"This camera is awesome in low light," Charles bragged. "A birthday present from my father."

"That and the toy car?" asked Sarah. Corey laughed. Ashley glared.

"Do we have to take them?" asked Charles.

"She was just kidding, Charles," said Corey. "Lighten up. I like your taste in cars and women." He winked at Ashley, which was just enough to trigger her dictatorial mode.

"Everyone wear dark clothes, soft soled shoes. We need to be quiet on this mission."

"Ashley, we don't really need four people to catch your old man hooking up," Charles said.

"He's not hooking up," Sarah said. "You'll see." She looked at her sister as she said it. Ashley averted her eyes, and spoke to Charles.



"We talked about this earlier, Charles. Remember what I said?" Charles lowered his eyes.

"Alright," he said. "They better keep out of the way."

"They will," Ashley said. Sarah hated hearing herself and Corey being talked about like they were babies. She wanted to tell Ashley what she really thought. Ashley had an ugly imagination and an even uglier boyfriend. The only reason she liked him was because he was rich. She pressed her lips together to keep the words from escaping.

Rain kept them from the photo mission the next night, and from the pocket park. She and Corey sat on the front porch swing and listened to the pattering rain, saw glistening and plump raindrops backlit by the street lamp. They kissed a few times, nothing more. Her mother was inside sweeping the bare hardwood floors. Again.

"Your mom sure likes housework," said Corey.

"She likes sweeping," said Sarah, "Not housework. There's a big difference."

"Is there?" he teased. He grabbed her hand and pulled it to his groin, pressed her palm against his stiffness. "I'll show you big," he said.

"Corey, not here!" she said. She pulled her hand away and slapped his thigh lightly.

The sky was clear the next evening. With Sarah and Corey squeezed into the back of the tiny car, they headed to the east side of town, near the shopping mall. Ashley and Charles had scouted the area. They pulled up into the parking lot of a large white apartment complex and parked in a space marked "Visitors."

"Don't you think Daddy will see the car?" asked Sarah.

"Duh," said Ashley. "Her apartment is a block down the road."

"Oh," said Sarah. Charles pulled down the front seat so she could climb out. He offered her his hand. Instead she grabbed the leather-covered hand bar and lifted herself out. He shrugged and went to the trunk to pull out his camera. Using the light from the trunk, he fiddled with some settings.

"Okay," ordered Ashley. "The mission is now in progress. No more talking and that means you, Sarah. Only hand signals, till we get back to the car. Got it?" Corey shot her an okay sign with his fingers. Sarah nodded.

With Charles and Ashley leading, they tread lightly down a sidewalk bordered by hedges. In single file, they moved through an alley, past several overflowing garbage bins that smelled like rotting meat. A skeleton of a dog stood by the bin poking his nose in a baby's diaper. She saw Charles pinch his nostrils with his fingers to block out the stink. She wished she could turn back, stop this silly mission. Daddy wouldn't be caught dead in a place like this. They moved forward.

To her right she could see the glowing lights of the Walmart beyond. Inside she knew ordinary girls her age might be trying on bikinis, or laughing as they spritzed perfume on their wrists. What kind of perfume did Stella wear, she wondered?

She looked away from the Walmart. A two story brick wall loomed in front of her. Suddenly Ashley was waving her hand, pointing at something. A car was parked in the shadows next to a garbage bin. A silver one. Daddy's!

"No!" she started to say. She pressed her lips together tightly, had to thrust her tongue against the roof of her mouth to keep the word from escaping. Instead she let a quiver of sadness pass through her chest. Corey reached back and took her hand, squeezed it.

The rest of it went by fast. Charles and Ashley hid between bushy Leland Cypress in front of Stella's door, she and Corey crouched under the some bushes at the edge of the building but with the front door in view. All was dark for a time, perhaps an hour or so. Sarah stayed busy trying to wave away mosquitoes but had to be careful not to swat or make noise. Corey kept his eyes trained on the front door.

Suddenly the porch light came on. Voices behind the door. Daddy emerged first, Stella came behind. From her place in the bushes, Sarah saw the outline of Charles camera rise in the air, a square awkward shape that didn't belong in the natural curve of the bushes.

The whore laughed, turned her face up for a kiss. Sarah's father covered her mouth with his lips, lingered. A sudden flash of light made Sarah see too clearly the woman's pale, delicate form molded into her father's embrace. Sarah felt a whirling in her throat. Words tried to fight their way up her throat. Disgusting. Cheater. Shithead. Why? I. Hate. You. She clasped her hand over her mouth, just in time to stop them from escaping. She felt Corey grab her hand and tug her away. He pulled her along at a run as they fled. Her mind whirled. She could not believe what she had just seen, but she had to. Her father's betrayal was frozen in a bright clear picture that would not go away.

They piled into the car and sped away. As soon as they turned out of the alley and into traffic on the four-lane road, Charles and Ashley high-fived.

"Now you believe me?" she asked. Sarah could not answer. There were no words.



"Charlie, let's go back to your place and upload the photos into your computer. That way we can see them on the big screen." Sarah could think of nothing she would rather see less. She clutched Corey's arm and shook her head "no."

"Can you just drop us off at the park?" he said. "Sarah's not feeling well." Ashley turned and looked back at Sarah.

"Cat got your tongue?" she joked. Sarah simply stared straight ahead. Ashley dug in her purse for something. "It makes you want to throw up, doesn't it? I have some gum. That might help." As though a limp stick of gum could take away the shakiness starting to well up from inside her.

"I can print some eight by tens in color!" he said. "Glossy or matte? I've got both."

"Glossy. It will be clearer," said Ashley.

"How many?"

"One is all it'll take," Ashley replied. She and Charles laughed.

Sarah burrowed her head into Corey's shoulder so she could not hear.

When they arrived at the pocket park, Sarah and Corey climbed out of the back seat. Ashley spoke.

"Remember we saw two movies, in case Mama asks," she said. "We don't want her suspecting anything." Why not? Sarah wondered. As soon as she sees the picture, all hell will break loose.

As soon as Corey and Ashley pulled away, Corey led her over to the lush grass behind the swings. The bushes' shadows cloaked the two in darkness. They sat down on the ground, side-by-side. He put his arm around her trembling body, pulled her close.

"We don't have to do anything," he said.

"I know," she answered. Feeling dizzy, she suddenly needed to feel the ground under her. She tilted back, taking him with her. They lay side-by-side with the heat of him against her, the cool ground underneath. She looked up at the stars, saw the familiar shape of the Big Dipper, a surprising sight considering the collapse of her own universe.

She thought about last summer and the cider. Seeing her father with another woman, she now realized anything was possible. Her father could have put a wormy apple in the cider. She hadn't died from it, or even gotten sick. Perhaps the worm had somehow made the cider better. What did it matter? The cider had tasted sweet.

She felt Corey's fingers thread into the gap between the buttons on her blouse.

"You're beautiful," he said. She savored the sound of the words, his touch. His fingertips slipped under her thin panties. She let herself melt into his touch.

"Yes," she whispered. J.D. had done it and so would she.





Kitchen Moths

by Mariana McDonald

Little did I know the moths had settled in.
They must have found this lovely spot
some time ago: my pantry.

There they nibbled on brown rice,
quinoa, flour, couscous, noodles,
waffle mix. A smorgasbord.

They flew about the space
as if it were their universe,
complete. My work,

grain-free diet, and broken heart
conspired to give them
those six shelves unquestioned.

My son home from college,
greeted by the swarming guests
as he searched for cereal or rice,

declared I must wage war,
and in minutes
it was done:

The tiny shelters
sacked, the whisk of clean
evicting them, the small

smearing corpses on the floor,
me whispering, shocked,
“*I’m sorry.*”



Thighs

by Mariana McDonald

She does not like us.

She calls us turnip-shaped, stout, and jiggly.
She hates that things don't fit us.

Does she not see that everywhere she's been
was with our muscle, our force, our nerves?

She'd love gambos like Leslie Caron, tall
French dancer-ones that shine in photos.

She's used us for decades on picket lines,
on dusty roads in a handful of continents.

In childbirth we helped her turn, walk,
wait, stoop, stretch, grit the body's teeth.

We held her up at her mother's grave,
her sister's corpse, her husband's deathbed.

When everything around her said
fall we held her standing, dignified.

We are her body's family, parents of
her vigor, siblings of her stamina.

All this we are for her, yet she
still deems us distant cousins.

She does not like us.



Blackberries

by Trina Gaynon

stain my hands purple
stain my face and shoes
fill my hands with thorn scratches
fill the Sabbath with vines
among the pot shards
among the pink ladies
stain the afternoon with exhaust
stain the air with motors turning
fill berries with sulfurs
fill the soil with oxides
along the track beside a freeway
among dried out berries
among oblivious cabbage moths
stain my shirt with sweat
stain my back muscles with pain
fill the pan with ripe berries
fill my knees with strength to bend
among spider webs
among stalky anise
stain the day with sunlight



Generations of Beans

"I was determined to know beans." -- Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

by Cynthia Gallaher

After my widowed mother married a civil servant,
meat and mashed potatoes again graced our table.

She whispered to me, "Only the poor eat beans,"
yet stored dried beans in our cellar, just in case.

Those beans transformed into markers on picnic bingo cards,
what danced beneath accountants' fingers,

And enemies' boasts didn't amount to a hill of.
They're what I glued, along with

Red lentils, green dried peas, onto black
construction paper and oatmeal boxes in school.

My tongue forgot the cooked variety's taste,
but a 20-something trip 900 miles south

Lavished mouth's memory by means of
Cajun red beans' spicy punch on Rue Royale.

After wedding bells back north, I also heard my macro-Mexican
husband call our shower gift potato masher -- a bean smasher!

Used when pintos swell deep pink and plump, only to give up under
pressure, turn creamy and fragrant under the soupy sway of garlic,

Onion, cilantro, cumin, all air-biscuit free with epazote,
and velvety folded with brown rice into corn tortillas,

And like mom, I store beans in basement cellar,
but also in cupboard's jars, to add to savory simmerings.

She visits, sees a humble kitchen,
but doesn't know we're intermittently prosperous
from great northern, black turtle, cannellino, toscanello.



Letter to Mary Lane, my consort's late mother

by Linda Umans

The monogrammed glasses they kept for you at Billie's Bar, Goldsboro, NC, we've spirited them up north. We often take memorial sips of your "silky" Johnny Walker Red. Remember winking at the bartender through foggy specs, saying *Lin, his Bloody Marys are beautiful*, ordering two house specials, your stubborn son sticking with his beer? The color, taste are still unmatched and you throughout the evening moving to the music mostly Dr. John, smoking those Carletons, savoring those fries, one at a time, to his cover of *Basin Street Blues*. I came to love him because of you.

In time we could have rocked those bar stools with red mustaches and me with no Carleton but a celery stick and me, a Brooklyn girl (I'll always be from Brooklyn) fitting in just fine in your little home with your XL irascible son and the Dr. John sound track, my warm little movie.

Now it's getting to be winter. Sweet potatoes for the holidays. Your Cuisinart son knows your recipe; whole milk, real butter, not your dreaded "low fat stuff." Your legacy is strong. That sad November we cleared your house, marveled at your keepsakes, meditated on your time with love. We left the roots to strangle the pipes, wreak havoc with the plumbing. The dog chose Betty over us. Surely he's chewing on her espadrilles; her closet is his playground now. I know you'd want to know.

I'm writing this from Pennsylvania, hibernating ladybugs gathering on the walls. When sun rays slant and warm their spot, they stir and move and that explains the orange stains you may find here and there. At the moment, you can find me sipping, immersed in NC autumn, and contemplating the sweet sad paradox of new late friends.
Love, Lin



Locel Honey

by Katie Archer

“As I was driving along highway 351, coming home to Alabama, I spotted this adorable sign, compliments of some sweet little old men selling fresh honey and apples. Hope ya’ll enjoy!”





"FROM INSIDE THE TRAIN, LEAVING MY SISTER'S" by Pam Desloges
About the photo: On the Amtrak Palmetto Route. In South Carolina.



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